THE SON OF THE HOUSE

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A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers New York

Published by arrangement with Dodd, Mead & Company
Printed in U. S. A.

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Published, March, 1926
Second Printing, March, 1926
Third Printing, April, 1926

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

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CHAPTER I

'But we are exiles from our fathers' land.'

Arequipa lies on the Roof of the World. A survival of Spanish times, it is a large upland city in the south of Peru; an earthquake-fearing city, paved with lava, its one-storey houses mainly built of grey volcanic stone: a cosmopolitan city, where ten years ago English and Scottish and French and German firms made money out of commercial offices and railroad and mines, while the Spaniards and the men of mixed blood, a world apart, carried on the minor trade of the place.

All day long the sun strikes down warmly over streets where sandalled friars jostle against brown-eyed llamas laden with copper ore, over dark churches dating from Colonial days, over palmy courtyards of rich houses and smoke-blackened archways of the poor. For the city lies on the seaward slope of the Andes. From its border one can look down west over a strange sparkling desert, out of which the sun evokes strange prismatic harmonies of grey and blue, brown and purple, before sinking into the Pacific fog bank; while eastward rise the peaks of a virgin range, smoking chimneys near at hand harshly drawn in black and white, visionary glaciers hanging far off in a mist of azure or violet, cliffs that the low light turns to pure transparent gold.

Fair Arequipa is served by a Cinderella of a port, which lies south of Lima by two days' journey in one of the big boats of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company;

an open roadstead, where day and night the vast Pacific surge thunders in upon the brown shore and goes out again moaning. There can hardly be a more desolate spot on earth than Mollendo, where rain never falls, but thick clouds and thicker fog, the seaman's worst enemy, hang for six months out of twelve over the cold Polar current that washes all along the Pacific seaboard. Rarely will a gleam of sun break through this gloom; never do the great breakers cease to tumble and roar along that arid coast; not a tree, not a bush, not a blade of grass relieves the naked slopes that carry up the Arequipan railway.

Here ten years ago a single disorderly street of brown stone and adobe buildings lay strung out between the sands and their low but steep line of coastal hills. The population was like the houses, a little disorderly, Spanish blood predominating, but Indian and negro common as well, and between them every shade of colour that mixed marriage can produce. Fortunately or unfortunately, there is no race problem on the Peruvian coast.

In Arequipa before the war a good deal of social life went on, pleasantly enough among the leisured Spanish and half-blood families, less pleasantly in commercial and engineering circles because of a dearth of women, yet with no lack of easy bachelor hospitality. Often of a night the Scottish assayer of the Silver Cap Mining Syndicate, watching from his carved balcony the moon rising behind El Misti, would exchange opinions of the country with the Irish-American railroad manager and—since national antipathies were not cherished on the Pacific coast—a couple of spectacled Germans from the bank.

But in Mollendo there was no social life at all, for no one stayed in it who could get away. Its handful of white residents were all men who had to earn their living either by the rail or by the harbour. Apart from station and pier, there was but one building that caught the eye: and that was only the macaronically named Fonda Hay, a ramshackle inn which served the needs of station staff and post officials, and round whose four walls the southerly breezes of the Pacific whistled day and night above a constant roar of surf.

Like most Peruvian houses, the Fonda Hay was built on the Spanish model of a quadrangle. The side facing station and street was frankly the bar of a tavern, crowded with customers, flaring with lights, and plastered with ragged advertisements of the Arequipan bull ring, while in the patio men could be seen drinking *chiche* or playing *siete y media* at any hour of day or night. Julian Charnwood, getting out of the train from Arequipa one warm and gloomy December evening, apparently did not care to mix with this polyglot crowd of seafaring men and long-haired Indian waiters, for he slipped round to the back of the building, where all was dark and quiet. In answer to his hammering on the door, an upper window was soon thrown open, and a man called down to him in fluent but flat Spanish, "Do not make that noise. The *patrón* is ill. What do you want?"

"Denis, it's I—Julian Charnwood."

"Oh Julian, how jolly!—I'll come down."

Almost directly the door swung open and Julian Charnwood was let into the private part of the fonda.

"Oh Julian, dear old fellow, I'm so glad to see you!" said his host in a whisper. "Wait while I strike a match, or you'll fall over things in the dark." The room filled with light, which revealed the speaker as a lean, slow-moving man of thirty, fair-complexioned and sandy-haired. "I was afraid I shouldn't see you now before you sailed. You go to-night, don't you? I've got a bit mixed over the days of the week."

"But what's wrong with the *patrón?*"

"He's very ill. Dying."

"Denis, you don't mean it?"

Denis Hay nodded soberly. "Harrison doesn't think he'll last out the night. That's why I didn't come up to Arequipa for the week-end like I said I would—because I couldn't leave him. He won't let me out of his sight. I had to get a holiday from the office."

"I'm most awfully sorry. Do you want to go back to him now?"

"No, oh no: Harrison's up there now. He isn't conscious. He wouldn't have him in the room as long as he knew anyone, but when he became unconscious he said he'd take him over for a few hours, for me to get some sleep; so I was lying down when you came; but I can't sleep, I'd much rather talk to you. I'm very sorry though to give you such a horrid sort of send-off, old man, but you see how it is. The *patrón*——!"

Denis's soft monosyllabic speech and incorrigible ambiguity of pronouns faded into silence, and only his soft apologetic smile finished the sentence, which indeed needed no finishing for anyone who knew Edward Hay. The *patrón* was as strange to his surroundings as the

fonda, which certainly was not the sort of inn that one looks for in a Peruvian seaport. This, the private side of the quadrangle, differed from the other sides in that it turned a blind wall on the patio and a pierced wall on sands and breakwater and southerly march of hills, and the immense grey fields of sea. Barred windows set four feet thick in brown stone opened over this remote outlook, which by day was terrifying in its colourless and empty desolation. Yet the room within was like an interior lifted bodily from one of the Home Counties. There was an Axminster carpet on the floor, and the furniture—plain, good, and comfortable—was appropriate to a bachelor Englishman of the upper classes. A couple of big leathern armchairs were drawn up on either side of an open hearth, and on a table between them lay recent copies of *Land and Water* and the *Badminton*, and the Christmas number of *Punch*. The room felt damp and looked neglected; but so might an English sittingroom have looked if its master had been laid up and the housemaid had scamped her duty. To come into such surroundings in Mollendo was stranger than to find an adobe hut in a Dorsetshire park.

To judge by appearances, much the same sort of gulf lay between the host and his visitor. Except in length of limb and breadth of shoulders, Denis Hay was in every way nearer to the Saxon type; his fair skin, light hair, and direct blue eyes, his inexpressive manner and moderate tone, stamped him as English born and bred. Pale, black-haired Julian, on the contrary, could pass among Spaniards for a Spaniard. Tall and lithe, he moved swiftly and with a deft gracefulness, helping out his talk

with gesticulation, and showing his white teeth in a ready laugh. He was cosmopolitan, Denis insular; the one, a stranger might have guessed, was native born, the other fresh out from home.

"I won't have anything, thanks," said Julian, forestalling his friend's hospitality, and throwing himself into a fireside chair. "I got some dinner at Cachendo. I'm fearfully sorry to hear this news of yours. You look fagged to death."

"I'm all right, it's only that I've never watched anyone die before, not in this slow sort of way that is, getting drowned or stabbed is different. He's been in such pain, and Harrison couldn't do much to ease him. It's his heart—what they call angina. However, Harrison says he can't last out another attack. It was touch and go this morning."

"I wish I could stay and see you through."

Denis smiled gratefully. "That's just like you, but you can't, and I wouldn't let you if you could. The idea of anybody stopping on here after he got a chance to get away!"

"So uncompromising? Strange, for a man that was born and bred in the country!"

"Ah, but I wasn't thinking of myself! I don't mind —I'm used to it. But you're English, and you've been away from home and all your people for ten years; it stands to reason you must be wild to get back."

For appearances were deceitful. Denis Hay, Saxon in build and colouring, had lived all his life in Mollendo; he was employed in Gunston and Co.'s shipping office not a stone's throw from the fonda, and there, but for an

occasional holiday in Arequipa, he sat all day on a stool with a pen behind his ear. But the Spanish-looking Julian Charnwood, energetic and thriving head of one of the largest copper mines in Southern Peru, had spent but ten years on the coast, and was still regarded as a stranger in spite of his Latin flexibility of temper. Coming out fresh from Cambridge on his father's death to tackle a property too long neglected, he had turned his Classical honours to such unforeseen account that he was a rich man by now, and one whose word carried weight with the railway directors and the piteously insecure Ministers of State: but though he was pretty well versed in Peruvian politics, and had received his baptism of fire in the abortive revolution of 1911, he still ranked only as a foreigner, useful but obtuse. On the Pacific coast a reputation for honesty draws trade but estranges sympathy.

Denis Hay, a junior clerk, naturally carried no weight at all; and that the two men were intimate friends was due partly to the conditions of Julian's business, which brought him down often for a night or so to Mollendo and its solitary inn, and partly to a natural fellow-feeling. Even in Peru, a land where purely social distinctions tend to merge in the great cleavage between fair skins and dark, there was a wide gulf between them, but it was bridged when, chatting together of an evening on the murky sands, they found themselves time after time in agreement, taking local questions from the same point of view, ranging themselves shoulder to shoulder against traditions of public life which fell extremely short of a Cambridge standard. So friendship was

cemented between them; a friendship which it was perhaps strange to find Denis Hay accepting as innocently as Julian offered it.

"Oh, so I am," Julian answered, lighting a cigarette as he spoke: it rarely happened that he had not one between his lips. "But I shall never settle down in England. Words fail me to say how much I want to get home, but I shan't like it when I do. Silk hats and kid gloves, oh my Lord! Here, out here, I've had money to burn and men to handle; if I'd stayed in England I should be a City clerk on £150 a year, living in a rotten suburb and going up to Cannon Street every day in a rotten second-class smoker."

"But you won't be a City clerk now," Denis mildly pointed out. "Everyone says England's jolly if you're rich, and you must be pretty well off."

"I am," said Julian in a puzzled tone: "I can't think how I've done it! Money always does seem to stick to my fingers." He spread them out before him in the air: long slight fingers and beautiful hands, and exquisitely kept. "Yet money-grubbing doesn't run in our branch of the family; I'm a freak. Are you sure you don't want to go up to your father?" Denis shook his head, his sincerity was plain and surprised Julian. He knew Mr Hay of old, one of those men who live by draining other men's nerves: an exhausting companion: and yet it seemed strange that Denis of all people, the patient Denis, should run away when he was dying. A burst of Spanish song came faintly through the wall. "What a row those fellows are making in the café! Why don't you turn them out?"

"They never worry him. He likes to hear them."

"Wonderful man! I mustn't let the time run on." He glanced at his watch. "Barely an hour before the boat goes. Denis . . ." But he hesitated, and Denis unconsciously interrupted him.

"How did you leave things in Arequipa?"

"Safe enough: Macintyre's in charge. He has no initiative, but he's honest, and competent within his limits. He can run the show for a twelvemonth—the time that I'm away."

"Where shall you go first—Paris?"

"Paris? not I! No, my friend: that is the sort of thing one talks of doing but one doesn't do it. I couldn't afford it, not without crippling next season's output, for I shall have heavy expenses when I get home—at least, I hope so. No, I'm going straight to London: P.S.N.C. to Liverpool and Euston and the Evangelical precincts of Bloomsbury Square. I'm going to see my family." He laughed and his rather hard grey eyes softened. Passion, if it had ever come and gone in Julian's life, had left no lines round his mouth and no sentiment in his memory, but the domestic affections ran strongly in him, and to Denis he spoke as he felt. "It's high time I did go and look after them. After all I'm the Head of the House. By what I can make out the other boys haven't done much. They never had much of a chance, poor beggars: I scored by getting through my years at Cambridge before the governor died. But there it is: I gather from Olive's letters that some of them want rounding up. She's borne the brunt of the responsibility till now, but I promise myself a warm quarter of an hour with Master Sladen when I get home. He was a wild young devil last time I cuffed his head for him. I can't

realise that he's a man now, or ought to be: he's eight years younger than I am—he must be twenty-four. Queer sort of life, ours! there can't be many families that are left on their own as young as we were—Olive eighteen and I twenty-two. But, Denis——"

"You were very fond of Miss Olive, weren't you?"

"I *am* very fond of her," said Julian emphatically. "I should like you to meet her; you and she would get on famously well." Julian's philosophy of life was of a rough and ready nature, full of short cuts: he still believed with touching innocence that those he loved would be sure to love one another. "But this is a digression. Stop interrupting." The black pupils of his eyes narrowed suddenly. "What I'm trying to tell you is that there's one thing I don't like, and that is leaving you out here by yourself. You'll hate it."

"Think so?"

"You hate it now—ten times worse than I do. I rail at the country, but I'm fond of it: it's diamond-cut-diamond, and I like using my wits. But you, Denis—you sit still and say nothing, but I believe you hate every pebble in the street!"

Denis sat still and said nothing, his blue eyes deprecating criticism.

"And naturally enough!" said Julian Charnwood. "I should hate it too if I had to spend eleven months out of the twelve in this God-forsaken hole. It's a dog's life, Denis: and—forgive me—it's a life for which you're utterly unsuited. You a clerk in an office! It's like a practical joke. So long as your father was alive I shut up, for I knew he'd keep his cl—— keep you with him, and indeed at his age and with his rotten health you

could hardly have deserted him even if he would have let you go. But, if Harrison is right, what's to become of you?"

"Become of me?"

"You'll hardly stick to the fonda!"

Denis smiled faintly. "I shouldn't make it pay."

"Mr Hay ran it on his own lines. Why he did it—a man like him, with good brains and a good education and no vices—why the mischief he chose to settle down in a South American pub, defeats me. I've known some queer inns in my time, but yours is the limit. Look at this room! it's lifted out of one of Galsworthy's novels. Those sporting prints are worth a lot of money, and there are books in four languages on the shelves. And he'll walk out of here to tackle a half-caste waiter or count a tipsy dago's change! Mind, I'm not asking questions—I don't believe," the say-all Julian added parenthetically, "you know any more about it than I do—but there it is, and if—if anything happens to your father it can't go on. Don't think me callous, old man." He dropped a hand on Denis's knee. "One wouldn't choose to start the subject to-night, but I must have it out with you before I go. I feel very worried about you. I'm afraid my going will make a lot of difference to you. You'll be so frightfully lonely. It would have been pretty bad in any case, but it'll be ten times worse if—if anything happens to your father."

This delicacy was thrown away on Denis, a person of literal mind and bald language. "If he dies, do you mean?" he asked innocently. "Oh yes, it would be pretty lonely, you know what it's done for me, having you here. But what are you driving at? Do go on, I shan't mind."

"I want you to get out of Gunston's. It's not your line."

"Line, I haven't got a line."

"Faith, you have!"

"What?"

"To be a Tory country squire, J.P. and M.F.H."

"Really? you don't say so!" Dennis observed, mildly sarcastic. Julian laughed.

"You haven't brought it off, I grant, but that's what you were cut out for. My good chap, you smell of trout and pheasants and Sunday morning half a mile off! Your father looks half foreign, but you've a reversion to type. I hadn't the pleasure of knowing your grandfather, but I'll be sworn he had sandy hair and a long nose."

Denis rubbed the long nose and remained silent as usual, but there came into the blue eyes a ruminative gleam as if he were amused. Julian saw it.

"Hallo! Has Mr Hay been throwing light—? Mind, I'm asking no questions: I never meddle with what's not my business."

"Don't you?"

For a fraction of a second Julian looked offended, but his annoyance vanished in a laugh.

"At all events we're quits, for I've never known a better hand than you are at keeping your own counsel. But to get back to my point: if you give up the fonda you can't stick to the office, for there's nowhere else in Mollendo fit for you to live in." Denis frowned thoughtfully at the light. "You'll get a fair sum for the goodwill (though you're safe to be cheated if I'm not here to look after you); it's a paying concern."

"Oh, very."

"Come to England on the proceeds!"

"I shall never touch one penny that comes out of it."

"Hey?"

Denis went over to the door and threw it open. A great blast of night air came in, impregnated with the smell of the sea, and set the lamp flaring.

"So now you know," he said defiantly.

"Not the purchase-money?"

"Never, never."

"Then what are you going to live on?"

"I don't care."

"Nonsense, Denis!" Denis remained immovable. After a moment Julian sprang out of his chair and followed him to the doorway. He leaned his shoulder against the opposite post and thrust both hands into his pockets, looking gravely down into his friend's eyes: between them the whole dark blank of the night vibrated with its eternal monotony of wind and surf.

"What's gone wrong?"

"I can't go into it now with him lying dying upstairs. But it isn't a bit of good arguing. I shall sell the fonda, but I shan't keep the money. I—couldn't."

Julian Charnwood had not spent ten years at the head of a mining agency without learning to recognise determination when he met it. Indeed he knew from of old that Denis, for all his gentleness, was little amenable to persuasion; when he had once taken up a position he was not soon dislodged.

"Bueno, hombre! Idiot that you are, I can take your point of view; it's a disreputable way of making money, and you haven't your father's freakish sense of irre-

sponsibility." He was silent a moment, knitting his brows over that riddle of the Sphinx, the character of Edward Hay. "You'll sell it and hand over the proceeds—to what? The Y.M.C.A. or the Missions to Seamen? And after—? You can't starve. Will you, for the sake of these ten years, let me lend——?"

"No, dear old man."

"Sure?"

"Quite, though I do thank you."

A short but heavy sigh marked the grave of one of Julian Charnwood's cherished hopes. "The Tory squire is proud, it's one of his cultivated failings. Now if you were I and I were you I'd borrow a few hundred like a shot."

"Yes, because if you were me you'd be safe to pay me back with interest. But I'm such an incompetent beggar! Money doesn't stick to my fingers. However, putting that on one side—though I haven't half thanked you: only I don't know how to do it and you wouldn't like it if I did—but perhaps I shan't want any help. I've had a long talk with—with——"

"Your father?"

"—this morning, and I've heard a lot I didn't know before. There are people—relations—I've got rather a heavy claim on."

"Hey! Denis—useful people?"

"I expect they are what you would call useful people. It is the Lalehams."

"The Lalehams of Laleham Chase?" Denis nodded soberly. "Is he secretive, your father? why, I've known him ten years and he's never breathed a word of it! The Dorsetshire Lalehams, that live half a mile from my uncle

Jack? But of course: yes, by Jove! That's why he was always so keen on hearing bits of Dorsetshire gossip."

"Oh yes, that's them. That was really why he went out of his way to be civil to you when you first came here, because you could tell him all the local news. He doesn't hear from them, you see: there was a quarrel. But there isn't any reason why they should quarrel with me. At all events I shall go to England and see them."

"You'll go to see Lord Laleham? It's like a fairy-tale," said Julian slowly. He was not an imaginative man, but there was trouble in his eyes. He had vague schoolboy and undergraduate memories of Lord Laleham as a man of forty and upwards, very handsome, dreamy, and remote. No one could have been less conventional than Julian, or more impatient of class distinctions when there is no corresponding distinction of spirit, and he had never felt any temptation to patronise Denis; on the contrary, Julian had looked up to his friend with the tender wistful admiration that a man of the world may give to his moral superior in a world where altruism does not pay; but his clear cynical mind warned him that Lord Laleham might take a less detached view. Denis as Denis, of course, was any man's equal, and blood-relationship counts high with the Laleham stock; yet there are limitations of training which impose limitations of outlook. He had an uncomfortable sense of having been taken at his word. An ex-Peruvian shipping clerk walking into Laleham Chase. . . .

"Do you know it's one of the show places of the country? It's a most beautiful old house: doves and clock tower, grass court and quadrangle——"

"The *patrón* said one reason why he took the fonda was because it had a patio like Laleham Chase."

"He said that? Humorist!"

"Why—hasn't it?"

"Good heavens!" said Julian under his breath. He slipped an arm round Denis's shoulders and turned towards the open doorway. It was now night: a light showed here and there along the foreshore amid a low huddle of labourers' huts and waterside buildings. The headlamps of a baggage train came crawling down out of the hills and along the rail above the sands. Clouds and thick darkness lay over the face of the waters, and on this side of the house there were no sounds to be heard but those of the large inanimate voices of nature, the wailing monotony of Pacific winds, which hardly ever swell to a gale, and the thunder-crash of the steep Pacific surf. But faintly from behind the fonda came the polyglot racket from the bar, the hoarse strain of a seaman's chanty, the twang of a novio's guitar. Suddenly the night was torn by the blast of a siren; the high throbbing hoot that speaks to men of sea voyages and changed conditions and broken ends of life.

"I must go in twenty minutes," said Julian: "—hark! what's that?"

A voice which came from a room above was calling "Hay! are you there, Hay?" in hurried, guarded tones. Denis started: and suddenly, betrayed as a lightning flash betrays a tract of unbroken country, Julian read in him the signs of conflict, of pain, of intense unwillingness to respond. "I'm here: I'm coming," Denis called back. But he did not move.

"Is that Harrison? Shall I see what he wants?"

"It's me he wants."

Denis was slowly closing the outer door: its latch caught. "Hay, you must come at once!" Harrison's voice came down again sharp with impatience. But Denis lingered to secure the latch and turn the key. Then Julian heard or thought he heard a second voice, weak and shrill with suffering: "Oh my God, that pain again—Denis, come!"

Denis ran up the stair and Julian followed him. At the far end of a wide, disordered attic Edward Hay sat up in bed, stretching out his arms; an animated corpse, a construction of yellow parchment and rattling bones. There seemed to be no physical life left in him; nothing but the soul's life of passion which flared like a torch in the sockets of his wasted eyes. Denis took Harrison's place, and Julian saw him give a deep irrepressible shudder as those skeleton arms closed round his neck. All his life Mr Hay had wanted more than he had, and apparently his dissatisfaction with the universe was pursuing him to his grave. His aspect was so terrible that Julian stopped short on the threshold. He no longer wondered why Denis had lingered below. Only a great love can satisfy the claims of such a death-hour.

Mr Hay's head fell forward on the young man's breast, and Julian thought he was gone, but no: a voice from the other side of the grave said "Denis, forgive!" Unhappily there are wrongs that cannot be forgiven though one's heart may ache to forgive them. Then the rattling breath went on, "You were all—I had of her—and I loved her so. . . ."

"I do forgive!"

It was too late. Still unsatisfied, Mr Hay had been

forced across the border: death took him with the one great exculpation on his lips, but without the response which it generally wrings even from earthly judges. Denis remained kneeling by his bed till Harrison and Julian, moved by a common instinct, wrenched away the pallid arms that were linked over his neck.

CHAPTER II

For a man of idle mind, walking down a London street, it is a harmless pastime to meditate on the variety of scenes that any one house might offer if its front wall were stripped off without warning. In the drawingroom, perhaps, in 1914, a social comedy after Pinero; in the kitchen quarters a genre study such as the Manchester Players used to give us; while overstairs, in privacy and darkness, the naked human ego wrestled with its own angel of ambition or sorrow or shame. It would have saved Denis Hay some pangs of anxiety if this process had been applied to the Charnwoods' house in Carlton Crescent, one wet March night three months after the death of Edward Hay.

Carlton Crescent was a street of tall houses of Augustan build, a relic of the days when Bloomsbury was a fashionable suburb; a patch of lean and leafless trees, whipped by March wind and rain, loomed darkly beyond, for No. 27 was the corner house at the junction of Carlton Crescent and Bloomsbury Square. Dark, inhospitable street! respectable close-drawn mansions! Many had been turned into offices, a few into shops, the greater number into boarding houses full of Germans and German Jews; but the high stern front of No. 27 maintained an aspect of dignified reserve. And Julian Charnwood, gay Julian, lived behind those gloomy windows? Incredible! If there is a wit of the staircase, there is also a presentiment of the doorstep. Dazed by the accumulated want of sleep after a rough voyage and a third-class

train journey, Denis had been too tired to indulge in the luxury of first impressions when he got out at Euston, and it was not till he stood on the wet pavement before No. 27 that he began to reflect on the changes and chances of this mortal life, and its fertility in disappointment.

In fulfilment of a promise dragged out of him at Mollendo, he had driven direct from Euston without waiting to warn Julian of his arrival; but now he wished he had not sent away his cab. Suppose he had mistaken the address—suppose Julian were out of town? He rang the bell—no light came, or noise of movement: nothing but the plash of rain on wet flags, the dismal drip of a leaking gutter, the clip-clop of his own retiring hansom, and the endless roar of traffic—to Denis a wilder and more formidable sound than the roar of breakers on a coast. And this was London! this was that England which all his life he had called home! He was not a fanciful man, but the chill of that wet March night seemed to be crawling into his soul.

Meanwhile, if he had only known it, most of the Charnwood family were gathered upstairs in a room on the other side of the house. It was a large room, and had a row of tall windows overlooking the Square. Indian curtains, dim black and red, hung down in straight folds shutting out the stormy night, and a winter's fire sparkled on a wide hearth under a high chimneypiece of oak carved into heavy trails of bud and leaf, which looked like the work of Gibbons or some contemporary craftsman. The far end of a parquet floor was taken up by a billiard table, the rest was partly covered by an Indian rug or two and strewn with easy chairs. There were

not many books, and scarcely any ornaments except a row of silver cups: there was a grand piano, but no litter of music: and a faint blue haze of smoke, in spite of ever-open windows, hung about under a ceiling which was not so white as it might have been. But the most striking feature were the walls, distempered in pale red and covered with chalk and charcoal sketches big and small: bold frescoes executed in dashing style mainly by members of the family, and as various in merit as in design. Under one of the most recent, a spirited Cubist study of "Diana Surprised While Bathing", was scrawled a vigorous J. P. C., and in the mild and spectacled features of Actaeon it was not difficult to recognise an eminent apostle of peace-at-any-price.

Altogether it was a pleasant habitable room, the sort of room that both men and women like to live in: nor did it want traces of mixed occupation—a Lang gun cabinet and a stocking basket, a battery of pipes and an immense earthenware bowl full of daffodils. Its tenants on this wet March evening included all Julian's brothers and sisters, and the reason why no one heard Denis ring was that they were all talking at once.

"Hullo, there's the bell, and Mary Salter's out," said Leigh at last from the billiard table in a lull. "You might go, Sladen, I went last time."

Sladen, who was cleaning a gun, scarcely pretermitted his whistling of a strain from *Sakuntala* to reply, "Not I. Let him ring."

"I will if you like," said Delphine, ever ready to oblige. But this offer was the less meritorious in that she knew it would not be accepted.

"Mightn't Salter hear, if we were to wait a bit? He

does sometimes," suggested Walter from his armchair by the fire.

"Dear boys!" murmured Olive Charnwood under her breath with her smile of genial irony. She ran her needle through the heel of a silk stocking of Delphine's, slipped off her thimble, and quietly left the room. But the Charnwoods, though indolent, were polite, and Leigh threw down his cue, while Walter shuffled out of his chair. They were however forestalled by Sladen, who overtook Olive on the landing. "My pidgin," he said with his habitual drawl. "It has occurred to me that it may be a lady friend."

Denis was turning away in despair when the door opened, and in the dark entry, lit only by a neighbouring street lamp, appeared a young man in evening dress. "I beg your pardon," said Denis, lifting his cap, "does Mr Julian Charnwood live here?"

"Julian? He's out."

"Oh."

"He mayn't be in till twelve," said Sladen, propping himself against the doorway in unaffected indifference to the beating rain. "'Care to come up and wait for him? I'm his brother Sladen."

"Oh no—no, thank you. I only wanted to see him for a minute. Perhaps I could come again to-morrow."

"Do."

"Who is it?" said Olive Charnwood over Sladen's shoulder, gazing in some curiosity at Denis and his suit-case. In view of the weather, she had not believed in Sladen's lady friend. "Why, you have luggage—you're just come off a journey! Won't you tell us who you are?"

"Are you Miss Olive?" cried Denis with involuntary eagerness in a warm glow of recognition. Sladen's cool half-insolent manner had taken the last grain of starch out of his courage, but now he felt as if Julian himself were speaking to him, in Julian's own beloved voice, flexible and clear. "Are you really Julian's sister? Oh, I've so often heard about you! I almost think perhaps you would remember me. My name is—I'm called Hay."

"Denis Hay of Mollendo?"

"Oh, did Julian——?"

"Catch up that suitcase, Sladen," said Olive laughing.

The firm clasp of her hand conveyed a world of welcome, and Denis, feeling warm at heart, followed her up in silence to the first floor landing, where dark walls and bare flags were exchanged for gas and a carpet. "You're dripping wet," said Olive. "Take off your overcoat and hang it here to dry." She had reckoned Denis up in one shrewd glance—worn clothes, muddy boots, fatigue, cold, and depression—and instinctively she treated him as she would have treated one of her own brothers. "I shall love to see Julian's face when he hears you're here. But I shan't tell him you tried to go away again. He's always talking about you and the queer South American life—I've a sketch of Mollendo with the pier in it, and the fonda, and the sands. Julian hits things off rather cleverly in pen and ink." And people too: Olive had guessed who Denis was before he gave his name. "Now I shall turn you over to Sladen's tender mercies while I get you something to eat. Come in—come in, Mr Hay." Laying her hand on his arm she drew him into the room where the rest of the family were gathered.

Some families are much more closely knit together than others, and the tie is often strongest, not in the old-fashioned household where the parents cling to their prerogatives, but in the loosely constituted, democratic group which bends to no control. The Charnwoods were of this order. Mrs Charnwood died when Delphine was in baby clothes, and Mr Charnwood—"no man's enemy but his own"—dragged his children after him from one Continental city to another in a halo of debt and discredit. His base of operations was a flat in Monte Carlo to which he returned winter after winter, and here, under the directions of a friendly Southern bonne, Olive learnt to guide a house. Mr Charnwood was incorrigibly Bohemian and nothing worse till his wife died: widowed, he sought consolation for what he called his *cœur navré* in the cult of strange drinks. But "he was very good-natured and had not the least harm in him", and his tragic end was the mere irony of fate. He was knocked down and stabbed by mistake for another man in an affray at a night club, and they carried him home to die in Olive's arms—then a girl of seventeen.

When, a few months later, Julian departed for South America, Olive was left single-handed to carry on the domestic tradition; there was no one to interfere, for they had no near relations except an uncle, Mr Jack Charnwood, whom Sladen once summed up as a gentleman who never took steps that cost money. Looking back, Olive used to wonder how they survived the adventurous times that followed. Mr Charnwood before he died had run through most of his resources except the copper mine, and even this, which came from his wife's people and was tied up under her marriage settlement,

had been so badly mismanaged that till Julian got into the saddle the profits which came out of it were not much to feed five young mouths on. In those times Olive gained an intimate knowledge of the shady side of French life. Adventures are likely to happen to a beautiful young girl of friendly manners, French enough to appreciate the jokes in the *Assiette au Beurre*, and English enough to trot about the gardens of the Establishment by herself. It was a legend in the family that Leigh had once fought a duel . . . and since Leigh never confirmed nor denied it, but merely sat and grinned, it may well have been true. Indeed Leigh would have let himself be cut into little pieces for either of his sisters.

But the Charnwoods had staying power. Friends, French and English, helped them, for Mr Charnwood with all his failings had a knack of being liked, and his children inherited it; cosmopolitan in outlook, conciliatory in manner, full of curiosity about men and things, they had that self-sown and sparkling vitality which is ever precious in *le monde ou l'on s'ennuie*, just as in damp weather people love to cluster round a fire. Five years later the family—still scarcely more than boys and girls in an ordinary reckoning—transshipped themselves, bills paid and colours flying, to the old town house in Carlton Crescent. The years of vagabondage were over, the Charnwoods were going to settle down.

The same energy as had floated them through their Riviera adventures was now devoted to becoming respectable. Walter's fate was fixed—a City clerkship: this Mr Jack Charnwood willingly procured for him. Sladen, aged nineteen, was already sealed to journalism. He had a front of brass and a ready pen, and from his brief

Lycée days onward had contrived to pick up half a living by the activities of the Parisian gutter press. Leigh had more trouble in finding a billet, but here again Mr Jack Charnwood proved useful; strong, shrewd, fearless, born with a turn for mechanics and trained to handle tools in a French engineering workshop, Leigh found his account in the new trade of flying, and his uncle, always happy to give what cost nothing, helped him with advice and credentials to a post in the Wandesforde Aeroplane Works at Hendon. Here then were the brothers all out in the world, yet still the family group hung together in Carlton Crescent, and Olive was treasurer of a common fund. Sladen, always the most sophisticated and the most detached, had rooms of his own in convenient proximity to Fleet Street, but even Sladen was always turning up at home when he had nothing better to do.

Much-travelled Julian was amused by the simplicity of their arrangements. No. 27 had been a place of consequence in Georgian days. The basement was now occupied by Salter the housekeeper and his wife, and the ground floor was let off in offices. Above came the Charnwood installation; a couple of large sittingrooms, a bathroom, and a makeshift kitchen below, and on the upper floors five bedrooms and a garret for a chance visitor, now occupied by Leigh, who had turned out of his own quarters in honour of Julian's return. Nominally the service of the house was done by Salter and his wife, but in practice the Charnwoods largely waited on themselves. Olive for instance did the cooking—cold meat, the *assiette anglaise* of innocent French satire, would have figured too largely on a Salter menu: and Olive too did a good

deal of hearty sweeping and scrubbing; with an occasional helping hand from Sladen or Leigh.

Olive, always Olive: it was Olive who found out that the house, when its lease fell in, was habitable, and that it would pay them better to live in it than to re-let it and stay on in France. It was Olive, in her best clothes, who convinced Mr Jack Charnwood that his nephews and nieces had not come home to borrow money. It was Olive who brought up Delphine in the way she should go, and tied her hair-ribbon, and heard her say her Catechism, and packed her off to church. But except over the youthful Delphine Olive had no authority; her plans were carried on their merits. When Walter came in with the milk, or pretty pink and scented notes dropped out of Sladen's pocket, Olive asked no questions. No. 27 was a pure democracy, and if Olive was the chief executive power it was only because she, more often than the others, saw what needed doing and did it.

A handsome set: strongly individual, yet linked by a strong family likeness: marked, all of them, even Walter, by a touch of the foreign and the unconventional. Leigh, the second son, was a broad-shouldered man of middle height, heavily built, black-browed, black-eyed, and none the more presentable for a scar that seamed his forehead, fierily red on a patch of unbronzed skin. But it was only the memento of a workshop explosion, and everyone who knew him loved Leigh: shrewd, frank, and bold, he spoke no evil and was as gentle as a girl. Walter was reading an evening paper by the fire: a large loose-knit man with kind eyes and an irresolute mouth, whose hand shook when he turned a page. Sladen, a year or so younger, the only member of the family who wore evening dress,

was dark like the others, but much slighter and remarkably impassive; his pale foreign features expressed no more than the hatchet profile of a Red Indian. If Leigh Charnwood, with his strong, scarred face, fell short of Mayfair standards, much more plainly did the well dressed and handsome Sladen bear the stamp of the *déclassé*, but for all that—and for all Julian's disgust—he was very like Julian: smaller, slighter, black-eyed, and without any of Julian's gay animation, but much the same in grain. His hand, narrow across the knuckles, its fingers thin and flexible under a silken brown skin, was Julian's hand copied small. These were Julian's brothers.

The youngest member of the family, but not the least important, had once been described to Denis by Julian as "a darling little kid", and by that title Denis recognised her on the spot. Delphine Charnwood, aged seventeen, beaming upon the world out of her beautiful brown eyes through a shower of curling locks that fell over her book and into her plate and wherever else they were not wanted—shabby, immature, ever-smiling Delphine did not seem to have grown far away from her portrait of ten years ago. And such seemed to be the opinion of the slight, fair young man, evidently not a Charnwood and far from shabby, who in the long intervals of play with Leigh had been helping Delphine to stir toffee, but was now engaged in tying up the lady's hair with a piece of string to keep it out of the saucepan.

Such was Julian's family. What he would make of it time alone would show. He was the Head of the House, and no democrat: as capable as Olive, less philosophic, and much fonder of his own way. But on the night of

Denis's arrival Julian had not long been at home, and so far there had come no clash of wills: nothing more than a slight accentuation, perhaps, of Sladen's smiling and secret irony.

"Come in, come in," said Olive, pushing Denis gently forward. "Messieurs et mademoiselle, this is Mr Denis Hay of Mollendo, our Julian's one and only friend. Will you kindly bring him over to the fire and dry him while I get him something to eat? My brothers, Mr Hay—Leigh, Walter, Sladen. The baby, Delphine. Mr Wyatt. Find him a change of slippers, Leigh, it's raining cats and dogs."

Among the Charnwoods, as in most primitive nations, hospitality was a cardinal virtue, and everyone came forward to welcome the guest. Behind the measured civility of modern life there often lurked, in the middleclass household of ten years ago, a half acknowledged fear; there was not much money going, and the servants had to be considered; the stranger within the gates meant a little extra at every meal, another course for dinner, a clean cloth, fresh flowers; and the cook would not care to put herself out to get supper when she was on her way to bed, and the housemaid, always on the brink of giving notice—what would happen if she was asked to get a room ready at ten o'clock at night? One did not exactly grudge the visitor his chicken and Australian burgundy, but the weekly allowance was a fixed sum and one could not see how next week's bills were to be met out of it; and one would not spare one's own trouble in making the bed, but there were appearances to keep up—it would never have done to send the maids off to sleep and do

their work oneself. And so, "Must you go?" said the mistress of the house, keeping the tail of her eye on her husband, who, good man! looked very much inclined to say "Don't go": but then it was not he who would have had to speak to Gladys. Now the Charnwoods, pioneers of the modern sans-gêne, had practically no servants, and so were able to welcome guests with open arms. They gathered round Denis, full of shrewd questions: there were few sea routes they did not know or know of, and they had a nodding acquaintance with most of the countries of the world.

"Have this chair," said Leigh, kicking the fire together with the toe of his boot. "And a cigarette to while away the time till supper comes. I won't offer you mine because they aren't up to much, but Sladen generally has a decent brand. I'm sorry Julian's out, but he's safe to be in before long."

"He's dining at the Spanish club," Delphine put in. "Dinner *de convenance*—I mean he wants to get something out of somebody. So he won't be late. Ow. Tommy, I won't have you pull my hair. He *does* want to get something out of somebody, and I *do* know—so! It's about that old railway——"

"Delphine, sweet child," said Sladen, "hadn't you better go and help Olive with the supper? These revelations may become embarrassing."

"Oh, nobody listens to Delphine. She's only a little girl." This was Tommy Wyatt, who was taking a mean advantage of Delphine's preoccupation with the toffee. "She isn't old enough— Pax, oh! pax!" He held up one forefinger, and Delphine, disarmed, solemnly but reluctantly crossed it with her own. "It's all very well

for you to say Pax directly I leave off doing the toffee," she grumbled.

"You came by the P.S.N.C., I suppose?" asked Leigh. "Oh, cargo boat—you must have had a rough time of it. Six or seven weeks, isn't it? Awful! So this is your first night in the Old Country? You won't like it, you know, Outlanders never do."

"Julian swears he's going back," said Walter: "says it's too cramped for him over here; he's so tremendously energetic, is Julian."

"And—er—militant," struck in Sladen. "He prefers to breathe the tonic air of a republic. It has charms, no doubt.

'On no condition is extradition
Allowed in Callao,'

and so on. I myself shouldn't mind running over for a week-end if they could insure against a revolution."

"Which is just what they can't do," said Leigh more seriously. "There must be no end of latent possibilities if they could only get a decent, stable government. But I never can make out what the trouble is. Should you call it a problem of the fusion of races?"

Denis, who was sitting in Walter's chair, and smoking Sladen's cigarette, and wearing Leigh's slippers, and feeling warm and comfortable but very shy, had got off hitherto with smiling monosyllables. To this direct question he was obliged to answer timidly, "I don't know."

"Wherein you differ from Julian," said Sladen. "I have not yet succeeded in asking Julian any question about Peru that he couldn't answer."

"Oh well," said Denis mildly, "I've lived there all my life."

"You mean," said the fair-haired Mr Wyatt, who had been looking on in curiosity and amusement, "long enough to know you know nothing?"

Denis, who had not meant to express himself so epigrammatically, looked alarmed. "Fellows that come out think it's simple," he paraphrased. "But when you're used to the men you get to understand how mixed up it all is. Even Julian burnt his fingers, you see, and he'd have come out on top if anybody did."

"Burnt his fingers?"

"In 1911. Getting put in prison."

"He never—" Leigh began, but Sladen cut in swiftly, "Ah yes, the revolution. But we never heard the ins and outs of that escapade: tell us how it happened, won't you?"

Denis glanced from one to the other, a sudden doubt of Sladen Charnwood springing up in his mind, but before he had time to reply Delphine sang out "Sneak, Sladen, sneak!" and Leigh expressed the general feelings of the family in a more dignified way. "Shut up, Sladen! Julian can hold his tongue if he likes, it's his business not ours. This is all news to us, Mr Hay: I expect it was such a sore subject—hullo, here he is!"

Denis started to his feet as a distant door slammed behind an energetic entrance and Julian ran up the stair. Very handsome and merry in his rather dandified evening dress, he came in pitching his wet overcoat on one chair and his hat on another. "Of all the vile nights—" he began: and then, transfigured, "Hullo, hullo, hullo! is that you, old Denis?"

"You made me promise to come straight here, so I did."

Julian's face was lit with delight and affection. He took his friend by the elbows and swayed him gently to and fro as though he would have liked to fold him in his arms. Denis coloured and dropped his eyes; naturally a reticent man, he was unable to forget like Julian that they were not alone, and he had never felt so keenly the contrast between himself and his friend, or between what he might have been and what Edward Hay had made of him. Walter, the most tactful of the family, murmured "Drop it, Julian," and Julian released the victim with a laugh that was half a groan. "Oh Denis, Denis! so you've done it, have you?"

"Done what?"

"Sold your goods and given the money to the poor."

"I do hope it isn't an awful bother my turning up like this," Denis hurriedly changed the subject. "I never meant to plant myself on you, I was going——"

"To an hotel. You dare!" said Julian, pushing Denis into his chair again and sitting on the arm of it. "Have you had any supper yet? Oh, Olive's getting it, is she? it'll soon come along then. What on earth—? Delphine, take that mess of yours off the hob and cart it into the scullery and then go to bed. Sladen, you lazy hound, go and see how Olive's getting on and stand by to lend a hand if she wants one. Here, Leigh, you and I may as well get the cloth on."

Energy, that was Julian: and his infinitely less energetic relations flew before him like dust in the wind. Delphine retired, injured, but still stirring the toffee while Mr Wyatt carried the saucepan; Sladen with his eternal smile went off into the kitchen; while Leigh, who

could turn his hand to any job and was as neat as a sailor, spread the cloth and laid the silver under Julian's superintendence. For it will readily be conceived that Julian superintended. Your born leader of men does not draw his own sword but gets others to fight for him.

Preparations were complete when Olive came in with her tray: hot soup and crisp toast, a silver chafing dish and half a litre of white Bordeaux which Sladen got from a friend in Bayonne. As she set it down Denis caught the glance that she exchanged with Julian, and realised afresh how much more alike the eldest brother and sister were than any of the others, even Sladen; alike in purity of feature, in a clear darkness of colouring, in length of limb and alertness of movement. But for Julian's extra inches and the classic wreath of black plaits that ringed Olive's head, Miss Charnwood could have masqueraded as her own brother.

"There now," said Olive: "shall I warm your claret for you? Just the chill off." Her eyes roved round the room. "Dear me! Julian, what have you done with Delphine?"

"Packed her off to bed. By the by, what room are you giving Denis?"

"Delphine's, for to-night. Del can come and sleep with me, and then neither Leigh nor Walter need be upset. Del's is quiet, too, and gets the morning sun. Sladen has carried up Mr Hay's suitcase——"

"Oh, but what a bother for you!" Denis broke out, reddening through his tan. "Oh, Miss Charnwood, I can't thank you!" He was indeed profoundly grateful; it was always an effort to him to face hotel porters and waiters, and he was tired too, tired from a long trying

journey, and perhaps from a secret nervous strain of anticipation. "Julian knows I never can thank people properly. But I do think it's awfully good of you to be so, so—so awfully good to me!"

"Our Julian's one and only," observed Sladen at the far end of the room to the unreceptive Walter, "has not the tongue of a ready speaker. Doubtless his heart is in the right place; but would you swear to his h's?"

CHAPTER III

It was close upon nine o'clock the next morning before Denis woke, and a flood of primrose-coloured sunshine was streaming into his room; the clouds had broken, the wind had fallen, and sparrows chirped among the black branches that were beginning to green over in a foam of elm buds. Some one must have come in while he slept, for his clothes had been dried and brushed and his trousers put into a press, a machine which puzzled him for some time, since he had never handled one before. Who had valeted him? Julian—he hoped: but the card pinned to his dressing table, "Bathroom on storey below, first door to right of stairs, you can shave there," was written in a small black printed hand not at all like Julian's.

While dressing Denis examined his room with a curious but reverent eye; it was so novel to him, so white and fresh, so candidly the room of a girl. Photographs of Miss Delphine Charnwood's many friends were stuck up over the mantelpiece, among them several of Mr Tommy Wyatt; her name was daintily worked in pale silks upon her frilled white comb bag, and two or three of her skirts and a frilled muslin dressing jacket still hung on pegs behind the door. Denis was almost afraid to glance at any of these pretty feminine properties, he felt himself a rude male intruder in a spot hallowed by the innocence of its previous tenant.

When he emerged upon the small bare landing, all was quiet: overhead an open skylight framed a square of

blue, while the sun flung a golden rhomboid down the green wall paper, which to judge by certain wavy irregularities had been put up by an amateur hand. When he descended, the same sunny silence prevailed everywhere, but while he stood hesitating Olive Charnwood came out of the kitchen, carrying in either hand a pair of highly polished brown boots, and attired in a linen shirt, a serge skirt, and a dark-blue First-Trinity tie. Was she after all so like Julian? Already the earlier impression of their resemblance was beginning to fade, and ere long Denis was as blind to it as Leigh and Delphine were.

"Did you sleep well?" Olive asked, smiling into his eyes with a fascinating maternal kindness. "—I'm so glad! And you had a comfortable bath and plenty of hot water?—Dear me no, we don't consider nine o'clock late, and in any case it was our fault for not waking you; but Julian hadn't the heart, you were so fast asleep." Then it *was* Julian, Denis reflected, feeling unaccountably disappointed. "Do you like ham and eggs? There's no one to look after you but me: Julian had to meet a man in the City, and the others are all gone to work—except Walter."

She ushered him into the breakfastroom. Like the other room it was large and shabby and sunny: the floor was of stained deal and the leather chairs were faded, but each of the tall open windows had its box full of spring bulbs, and on the table stood a great cluster of early wallflowers heaped up in a Rouennais bowl. And the white walls were hung all over with etchings, paintings, pencil drawings, some framed, others pinned up in the rough.

"Coffee for two," continued Olive, coming in with her

tray. "You are not an insular Englishman to insist on having tea. Aren't you hungry? I am. I haven't had a proper breakfast yet, and I was down at six to look after Leigh. He always has to get off at an unearthly hour. Did you identify him last night? I was so sorry for you, there's nothing more trying than to be dragged into a roomful of strangers when one is tired from a journey."

"But I wasn't treated as a stranger," said Denis smiling. "It was like coming home."

"Was it? I like the way you say that," said Olive, examining him with her brilliant eyes. "So it ought to be—I know Julian regards you as an unofficial brother. Yes, do cut the bread, please—thick, for me. Well now, shall I tell you all about us? I suppose Julian never mentioned our names: men don't as a rule—though I really don't think Julian can hold his tongue about anything. Have you heard of any of us?" Denis nodded.

"You are Miss Olive, and you were always his special pal."

"He said that? Dear old Julian! Ah well, the others were hardly grown up when he went abroad; ten years are a long time. But he hasn't altered much, Mr Hay; I never knew anyone who could go through things as Julian does and come out on the other side without turning a hair. Leigh, the one with the scar, comes next. He works for Wyatt and Wandesforde, the great flying people. That was Tommy Wyatt, the son of his chief, that was in here last night."

"Does your brother fly?"

"Not much. He's in the workshop four days out of five: he has his ticket and goes up sometimes on trial

flights when they're testing new machines, but his job is chiefly mechanical. He's been mixed up with motors ever since he was a boy. He drove the Wyatts' car in the Gordon-Bennett Cup race three years ago."

"I suppose Mr Wyatt was motors before he was aeroplanes."

"Exactly. Some marmalade? . . . But Tommy Wyatt is always up; he's a firstrate pilot, as cool as he is daring. I've seen him looping at Hendon, turning over and over in the air; that's rather a new trick." It was, in 1914. "Did you notice him? He was supposed to be playing billiards with Leigh, but he was in Delphine's pocket all the time."

"Is Miss Delphine gone to school?"

"Delphine at school!" Olive repeated laughing. "If she heard that she never would forgive you. Haven't you discovered that Delphine is grown up—very, very grown up?—She's the baby of the family, and we all accuse one another of spoiling her. We feel that she requires to be sternly and systematically sat upon, but somehow it never comes off. She works hard, though, as hard as any of the boys. I'm the only idle member of the family." This confession, though it was evidently sincere, Denis took with a grain of salt. "Delphine is a distinguished artist. I dare say you've seen some of her performances."

"Me? I've never been to a picture gallery in my life!"

"Delphine doesn't exhibit at the Academy. Haven't you heard of Triumph Tea?" Denis remained blank. "Or of Pringle's Peerless Pawkpeighs?" Illumination began to dawn. "Ah, I felt sure you couldn't have travelled down from Liverpool to Euston without running

across the egregious Pringle. Delphine won second prize in an open competition that he held a year ago, and since then she's done work on and off for him and two or three smaller firms. She's excessively pleased with herself just now because she's had a cartoon taken by the Complexion Soap people. There's an understudy for it." Olive nodded towards a large sheet of cardboard which was attached to the wall by drawing pins. A symphony in three colours, it represented a large white and black cat, red-ribboned and all one purr from tail to whisker, washing her face before a looking glass with a lavishly lathered paw.

"Did she do that?" said Denis aghast—"that little girl with her hair down?"

Olive laughed, apparently better pleased than Delphine would have been with this tribute of pure amazement. "You'll see it on the boardings in a week or two. Brandon, her master, calls it a prostitution of natural talent. But it brings her in a few stray guineas, and keeps her out of mischief. That cat is clever, too," Olive added with the curious critical detachment which all the Charnwoods manifested on a topic of art. "She has the knack of making her animals come alive. Whether she'll ever make a painter—! But, for her age, her draughtsmanship isn't bad."

"To me it's wonderful," said Denis soberly. "Quite wonderful! So different from Spanish ladies, who never go outside their own houses. But I might have known Julian would have a very clever family. Are all the others clever too—Mr Walter—is he clever?"

"Walter drinks." It was so simply spoken that for a moment Denis was puzzled, but there was no mistaking

Olive's honest melancholy eyes. "He has a sober fit on just now, but you may as well be warned, for he's sure to break out again in a day or two. He's tried again and again to pull up, but he can't, so Leigh and I agreed that if he must get drunk he had better do it here, where we can look after him, than in lodgings where he would go altogether to the devil. He'll drink himself to death in a few years." Her smile was very sad as she quoted the trite epigram, "'A better man there couldn't be when he's sober.' He's just a big, gentle, helpless child—" She checked herself. "I didn't mean to worry you with all this. Do you know, I begin to understand why Julian tells you everything?"

"Thank you for telling me. I'm not shocked," said Denis simply. "Everyone did drink in Mollendo, more or less. But of course it's different for ladies."

"We keep it from Del as much as we can. But it's a bad business," said Olive with a stifled sigh. "Sladen wanted to have him in his own rooms at Agar Street, but Sladen is a late bird himself—has to be—and I'm always afraid of Walter's setting his bed on fire."

"Sladen—that's the very dark, young one, isn't it?"

"Yes, the boy who opened the door to you. Observe his sign manual over the fireplace." Denis glanced blankly at a series of little holes which traced pretty regularly the letters S L A D and half an E. "Revolver shots," Olive explained resignedly. "Cecil Hurst, the *Day* correspondent, was talking about the Wild West trick of turning an ace of hearts into a nine, and Sladen said 'I can cap that', and he did it then and there. I couldn't stop him. Of course I knew we should have the police in before he was through with it, and we did, but

much he cared! Luckily Leigh turned up and took the revolver away, and he and Hurst between them pacified Dogberry, and Sladen sat on the edge of the table and laughed. He can do anything he likes with a gun or a pack of cards. By the by, you must never play with him for money—it's against the rules of the house."

"Oh, I never play for money—I never have any."

"Then he won't want to play with you," said Olive cynically enough. "But you won't see much of him in any case." Denis privately thought he could resign himself to Sladen's most extended absences. "You won't like him," Olive added, giving him a moment's careless scrutiny. "Men don't: which, I suppose, is the most damning thing that can be said of a man. Yet on my honour I don't know why, and I wish you would form an exception! There's nothing much wrong with him but his manners, which are certainly a trial even to his affectionate family. But he's like the man in the Bible that always said 'I go not.' "

"Why—does he go?"

"Usually."

Breakfast was over by now, and Olive, perhaps feeling that she had again gone too far, rose and pointed to a chair by the fire. "Sit there and enjoy your morning cigarette, or pipe is it? while I clear the table. No, I don't smoke. No thanks, you can't help me—honestly, it's one of the things one does quicker alone." She was so transparently sincere that Denis resigned himself to inaction, the more readily because it gave him pleasure to watch her moving about the room—piling up silver and china on her tray, brushing off crumbs, creasing the good damask into smooth, even folds. A vainer woman might

have felt flattered, but Olive's penetration was not dimmed by self-consciousness, and remembering Mollendo she reflected that an English breakfast table and its mistress must seem far more foreign to him than revolver shots.

When it was all done she sat down on the other side of the hearth in Walter's chair, her hands laid on its leathern arms, her slight ankles and rather shabby shoes extended towards the friendly warmth of the flames. She had a beautiful foot—the slender flexible foot that one sees in sketches of Taglioni or Fanny Elssler, in the days of the dancers. She smiled at Denis and Denis smiled at her: he could not analyse his own feelings, he only knew that Olive soothed him and put him at his ease, relieving the constraint that tortures many a shy man all his life long like a bodily disablement. That this pleasant atmosphere was intentional—that Olive had talked to him about her family because she had taken a fancy to him and wished to draw him out about his own—he was too inexperienced to understand, but he was as much at ease with her as he would have been with Julian: and yet she was not Julian, and there was a piquancy . . . Nothing so pleasant had ever happened to Denis before.

"What shall you do with yourself now?" asked Olive. "Julian said, if you liked to wait till he came in, he would take you to the Tower and Madame Tussaud's. Do you feel drawn towards the Tower and Madame Tussaud's?"

"And the Zoo and Westminster Abbey? Dear old Julian!—I shall go out for a turn by myself, but I'll be in in time to meet him, if it won't be a bother to him. Is he awfully busy?"

Olive shrugged her shoulders. "He's in the City a

good deal; getting things out of people, as Delphine remarked last night—concessions of some sort in connection with the new railway, I'm not very clear about them."

"He said he had an uncle who lived in Dorsetshire." Denis leaned forward to shake the ash from his cigarette. "He said he was going down to see him. Has he gone yet?"

"He's talked of it ever since he came home, and I believe he really means to go this week or next. Why?"

"Because," said Denis in his diffident, deprecating way, "I thought perhaps if he didn't mind we might go together."

"The Lalehams of Laleham Chase are your cousins, aren't they?"

"Relations: a sort of. I suppose you know them?"

"I never saw much of Lord and Lady Laleham. I used to meet Miss Laleham and her brother pretty often when I was staying with Uncle Jack."

"Did you? What are their names?"

"Sophy and Martin."

"Are they—are they nice?"

Olive smiled in spite of herself, either at the question or at the form of it. "'Nice' is vague. But, yes, Sophy is certainly nice. She is very sweet looking, very attractive."

"And Martin—is Martin attractive too?"

"Martin? . . . Yes, Martin would be considered an attractive man."

"What—what sort is he?" Denis asked, fumbling among unfamiliar conceptions. "Very—very smart, of course: tremendously well dressed and all that sort of

thing: one of those fellows that look at you as if you weren't there?"

"In short, the complete Guardsman, six feet two in his stockings?" Olive's smile broadened irrepressibly into a laugh. "Oh, poor Martin!" She held up a newspaper between her face and the fire, and, as it happened, Denis. "No, not so bad as all that. He is a plain young man with an amiable expression and rather shabby clothes: and he once confided to me that when he travels on a strange line he never can catch a porter's eye."

"You like him? I'm so glad."

"I did not say so!"

"No, but your tone . . . And I'm glad." Denis was pursuing what Julian called one of his ground-ivy trains of argument, "because, you see, I've lived all my life in Mollendo. You can't guess what that means. Arequipa wasn't much of a place, but Mollendo was nothing at all. There was next to no white society: no ladies—you're the only lady I've ever talked to in my life. In fact, Julian is almost the only gentleman, too." His simplicity of language moved Olive again to smile. "Ah!" said Denis wistfully, "don't *you* laugh at me!"

"It is only that you sometimes express yourself like a foreigner."

"Oh, do I? There you are—that's where I go wrong: and there are lots of other ways, like when you take your hat off and when you keep it on, and getting up and sitting down, and wearing gloves, and paying calls and writing addresses on envelopes. Don't misunderstand me." His eyes were deprecating still, but very steady. "I know I am by birth Martin's equal. But I'm not his equal by breeding, and I want to be. What I've got to

make up is the ground one loses by not going to a public school and a university. I do so wish you would help me. Will you?"

"Warn you, that is, when you do anything un-English? Yes, of course I will. But I don't guarantee the accuracy of my information. I'm afraid we're not 'in the county' ourselves," said Olive drily. "We're a Bohemian set, Mr Hay: you mustn't imagine that in respectable families the mistress of the house cleans the boots. You call me the only lady you've ever met, but I'm afraid Lord Laleham wouldn't admit the exception."

"But Martin would?"

It was a stray shot, or rather no shot at all, for Denis was purely innocent, but the least observant of men could not have failed to see that it went home. "Martin—?" said Olive with an irrepressible start: then, recovering herself, "Perhaps, but Martin has known me since I was a child. However, I'll do my best. You won't want much drilling: you have the essential already."

"What's that?"

"Simplicity."

"Thank you. But my clothes?"

They were indefensible. "You must have a new suit," Olive pronounced. "Get Julian to take you to his own tailor and give him carte blanche. That one was ready-made, wasn't it? Your collar is all right, but you want new ties; I'll help you choose them if you like—the colours Julian wears wouldn't suit you. Your boots will do: probably they're a better shape now than they were when you bought them. You tread evenly, you see, like Julian and Sladen—they wear their boots for years, whereas Walter will go through a pair in a fortnight.

But you must learn to take more care of your clothes. You would never see Julian throw his wet things over the back of a chair as you do: I was horrified—" So was Denis, and betrayed it by his speaking features. Then it was *not* Julian after all! Olive burst into a gay laugh, a hearty laugh like a boy's. "Oh, I'm so sorry, do you very much mind?"

"I *don't* mind, and I knew it was you all along, I thought it was Julian but I was sure it was you!"

"I'm afraid Julian would never have taken your clothes to brush. Nor," Olive added ruefully, "would Sophy Laleham! So there's a case in point, and you can't whitewash me—I really am not a lady, I'm only a painstaking housemaid." She composed herself to gravity again. "Well then, you must have evening dress if you can run to it, but Burnaby will see to that. Perhaps you had better let me come with you to buy your dress shirts: Julian is so—so fly-away."

"I should be most awfully grateful if you would," said Denis, still rather red, but consoling himself with the reflection that at all events he never snored. "Because for going into a family of really well bred people like the Lalehams it isn't good enough to be one of Nature's gentlemen, even if I were."

"Are you going to call on Lord Laleham?"

"I can, can't I?"

Olive hesitated. She would have liked to answer at once, as Julian would have done, but she was older in mind than Julian, and in the course of considerable worldly experience she had learned many things which Julian had never learnt and probably never would learn. Even Julian had foreseen danger in Denis's single-

minded simplicity: Olive, who knew more than Julian of Lord Laleham, his temperament and his family history, was alive to perils of which Julian was unaware.

"I hardly know how to answer that question."

"Why?"

"Because I am not sure if you understand how English people look at certain things."

"What things?"

"Certain relations."

"But what relations?"

"You make it very hard for me."

"I'm sorry!" said Denis hastily and gravely. "I never meant to worry you."

There was a short silence.

"I think your father's name was Delahay."

"No, you are wrong."

"Then I beg your pardon."

"Why? you haven't offended me. I can't think how you know so much, unless—" he checked himself on the brink of saying "unless Martin told you": not again would he refer to Martin. "But you couldn't possibly know more."

"I'm in the dark," said Olive. "I thought I understood, but I don't. If—since—I was wrong: since there's no mystery, nothing but the ordinary tie of cousinship, I am sure you have nothing to fear. If you made a social slip, it might put Lord Laleham off for a moment, because he's intensely English and intensely Conservative: yes, and Martin too: he is critical, is Martin, and fastidious, though he doesn't know it. But they would get over it directly, for you don't do any of the things that they would permanently dislike."

"What are they?"

"For instance . . . if you fidgeted with your hands, or called me Miss Charnwood after every second sentence: or if, when I was telling you about Walter, you had asked a string of questions, instead of listening and looking sorry."

"Oh, but how could I?" said Denis, shocked. "How could anyone?"

"Do you mean that? . . . Yes, I see you do," said Olive smiling at him with a motherly sweetness that brought a flush to his cheek though he did not fully understand her. "Yes, you will get on famously with Martin at all events, I promise you that, Denis."

She made him colour up again like a boy. "There now," sighed Olive, "another coat of whitewash wanted! Sophy Laleham wouldn't do that either."

"I do wish you would!"

"Go on calling you Denis? Would you like it?"

"Rather! Love it. You see, I feel as if I'd known you for years and years, through Julian: and you know all there is to know about me. There isn't much."

"So transparent, Denis?"

"You really will?"

"If you like! I probably should in any case, because I'm so used to hearing Julian do it." The next moment, to her inexpressible surprise, she found Denis on his feet before her, bending low over her hand and carrying it to his lips. "Good heavens, my dear boy, I'm not the Queen! That's very un-English."

"Oh, is it? I didn't know. Spaniards do it," said Denis. Then in a swift wave of confusion. "It isn't—it wouldn't be considered disrespectful?"

"Oh dear no," said Olive, recapturing her composure. "You did it very prettily." It had given her a fresh view of Denis, whose diffidence had slipped from him like a cloak in the performance of the stately foreign courtesy. "No Englishwoman would mind your doing it, though, like me, they might pretend to. I didn't really."

Denis, relieved, broke into a sudden smile. "Spanish ladies sometimes pretend to mind. So you have something in common with them after all." Still standing before Olive, he finished with some deliberation. "There's one person in your family you haven't told me anything about, Miss Charnwood."

"Who?"

"You."

"I? Oh, I'm one of the happy people that have no history. And, heavens! it's half past ten," Olive cried, springing up. "I must fly into the kitchen, or you won't get any lunch to-day. Believe me," she added, smiling at him over her shoulder from the doorway, "peeling potatoes is far more in my line than having my hand kissed, *amigo* Denis."

CHAPTER IV

"England, with all thy faults——"

"I say, do mind my hat!"

"I love thee still," declaimed Julian Charnwood, standing in the middle of the road. "*Bandolero, tío indecente*, brigand of an indecent uncle, can you look on a scene like this and think of nothing but your hat?"

"All very well," said Denis mildly—he was accustomed to being called strange names out of Julian's copious Spanish vocabulary—"but when you've only *got* one hat!"

Julian, who had been swinging his stick within two inches of his friend's head, lowered it and walked on more soberly, recognising no doubt that the fairest of spring mornings need not be celebrated by putting out another man's eye. It was the thirty-first of March. They were alone on the broad, turf-bordered lane that led from Laleham Halt to Laleham village, and all around them the Dorsetshire countryside, bright as a landscape in watercolour, was bathing itself in a sun-steeped, southerly air. The sky was lavender-blue, and light lay over the Downs like a golden garment: fire-sparks of dew glittered on every grass-blade: in the rambling hedges young may-buds pushed their million emeralds between the russet leather of last year's oakleaves. In the plain a haze, grey as the bloom on a plum, lay over ploughed fields or floated among river-sallows and along the springing hay.

It was no wonder that Julian, who had not seen Eng-

land in March for ten years, and Denis, who had never seen it at all, were moved to admiration: yes, and to deeper feelings. The soil that has borne us and our fathers has for the least sentimental among us its own profound appeal, and no one feels it so keenly as the returned exile. There was a mist even in Julian's practical eyes as he climbed the hill and felt the south-country air breathing on him with all those earthy, woody smells that come out of turf and brook and furrow when the mild winds of March begin to blow. As they mounted up and up by the long-familiar, long-unfamiliar road of his childish days, he was silent, even he! content to listen to the little torrential fountains of melody that came overflowing down out of the sky, where larks hung poised on vibrant wings, dark beating atoms well nigh invisible in the steep blue. Now and then Julian glanced at Denis, whose bronzed, healthy face expressed nothing more than its usual mingling of patience and sweet temper: it was against the rules of the barbarous Charnwoods to gossip over a guest, but in his private mind Julian was eaten with curiosity.

Their road, leading higher and higher over a spine of hills, bent away presently into a grove of beech and fir trees, and when it emerged, from damp blue shadow into golden sun, the landscape had changed. They had come out on the other side of the range: the cultivated country rolled away behind them, and a lonelier district opened towards the south among steeper and more broken hills, in wilder lands of turf and heather and heavy masses of wood. Through the plain a river flashed and brawled, and on its banks lay the hamlet of Laleham, to which their road ran down in a great curve: a huddle of cot-

tages, a church with Norman tower and porch and Decorated nave: a watermill, where the arrested stream ran glassy dark to the creaming foam of a weir: a shop or two, a forge, a post-office, and some scattered houses of greater or less pretensions, from which a few pleasant human noises came up rarefied by distance. Halting under an immense beech, last outpost of the grove, Julian pointed to an old building that lay half a mile off, mapped out amid brightness of March flowerbeds amid verdure of field and wood in all its delicacy of Tudor brickwork. "That's Greys, where I was born."

"Where your uncle Jack lives now?"

"Yes, confound him! *he's* an indecent uncle if you like. Sit here for five minutes, Denis, I'd like to get the lie of the dear old place again." He propped himself against the beech stem, while Denis, who was not fond of unconventional attitudes, rather slowly and discontentedly sat down on the turf at his side. "Yes, that's where my dear Uncle Jack is now living on the proceeds of sugar and bacon."

"?"

Julian made a grimace. "Didn't you know? Probably it's from him I get my turn for trade, and yet there seems to be some sort of distinction between an Arequipan copper mine and bacon in the Old Kent Road! Yes, Uncle Jack was a grocer: it's not romantic, is it? but it pays. My honoured father, who was, to be frank with you, a bit of a harmless scamp, declined to soil his hands with commerce: result, Gentlemanly Feeling sells the family property, and Sugar and Bacon buys it back."

"Dear me!"

"It's so odd," Julian said, taking off his straw hat and fanning himself with a large green silk handkerchief, "I always think there's something so extremely odd about the English middle class! Take us for instance. We really come of very decent stock: my grandfather hunted the Laleham Harriers, and we can reckon back without any humbug as far as a Charnwode who was A.D.C. to Prince Rupert. I myself, simple and unaffected as you see me sitting here, am a gentleman in the technical sense, entitled to wear a coat of arms. There are Charnwood hatchments in the old church down there cheek by jowl with the Lalehams and Mostyns. My grandfather turned out wild, ran through his money, ran off (all in the way of virtue) with a French opera dancer —my grandmother was the most fascinating woman I ever met, but she was a popular star under the Second Empire and her people kept a sausage shop in the Rue de la Longue Haie—and now look at us!"

"What are you?"

"A mixed bag, like nine middle-class families out of ten. Uncle Jack—I'm sorry to have to own it—bounds. He props a Baptist chapel in a frock coat and brown boots, and I can yet remember the noise he makes over his soup. Oh heavens," said Julian, pointing with his stick, "think of patronising a Baptist chapel in preference to the tombs of your ancestors and a lovely bit of Decorated work like that! His son Frank, growing up in the days of opulence, went into the Hussars, where, as he's a very engaging fellow with a temper like Leigh's, he soon became uncommonly popular. Now that he's crippled, poor chap, and lives at home, he and his father run two distinct sets, and the house is occasionally full of people

who aren't on speaking terms. When Olive goes to stay, the county lot regard her as Frank's cousin and are civil to her—on tolerance, she swears: but on my word I don't see Olive going to the Chase on tolerance. However, they would draw the line at marrying her, though they would let Frank, lame leg and all, marry one of their girls because he's gilt with the pickles, which Olive isn't. But—now mark, here's the rub!—when Leigh or Sladen go to stay they're classed not as Frank's cousins but as Uncle Jack's nephews!"

"And cut?"

"Well—grazed."

Denis, who was incapable of taking a frivolous view of English social law, examined the case gravely. "I see: your cousin, who is rich and presentable, mixes with all these big people on even terms, while your brothers, not being rich——"

"—and not being presentable, don't mix at all: and Olive hangs in mid air. Those are the rules of the game: and isn't England *impayable?*"

"Do you mind?"

"I do rather," acknowledged Julian, digging irritably at a wayside root of primroses till Denis took his stick away from him. "Not Sladen. I don't care a hang about Sladen. He's a queer fish, and I've heard tales that I didn't much like. But I mind about Leigh, because he feels it himself. He's no end of a good sort is Leigh. Here, you give me back my stick, I won't dig up any more primroses—only I do rather mind about old Leigh." Denis gazed tenderly at his friend, he was more in sympathy with Julian's occasional lapses into simplicity than with Julian's worldly wisdom.

"Mark you," Julian passed on, "I wouldn't alter it if I could. It's all so practical, so illogical—so characteristically Teutonic. Why, we're all in the same boat, Denis—the county bigwigs get served with the same sauce when they go to town! But it's at a country function that the system comes into full bloom, and you hear 'em playing My-Relations-and-Your-Relations as if their lives depended on it. I've never met a middle-class country family but what the pick of the basket knew one Lord (if it's only the vicar's patron) and the small potatoes knew one chimney-sweep. Class distinctions! You've got to either take them as they stand or turn Red Republican; and I've had enough of republics to last me my life."

He was so unaffectedly frank that Denis did not scruple to put the obvious personal question. It only made Julian throw back his head and laugh.

"That's what I'm anxious to learn! Where do I come in—with Frank and his polo ponies or with Sladen and the pickles? It's a devilish nice question. I'm an Eton and Trinity man and I'm prepared to chuck my money about, subscribe to the hunt and all that, but I doubt if they'll smile on the copper mine! The Army List is solid, you know where you are with that: but mines are an exotic show, and Latin America sounds so dissolute!"

"If I were you," said Denis stiffly, "I should settle it up for myself."

"By declining to stand for election? Ah!" Julian's shrewd amused eyes flitted over his friend's inexpressive features. "There speaks the Tory squire again. But you pre-suppose that I care."

"Don't you?"

He shook his head. "Only to this extent, that in any countryside the 'best set' are the best fun. In a city it's not so, or not so much so: there are other strata where one can amuse oneself—artistic, literary, theatrical. But in the country it's only the upper set that are natural enough to be amusing. They will do as they like and they carry their own values with them. Your English hidalgo of forty, with Homer and Horace and sport and travel and a slice of political or diplomatic life and ten years of Brooks's or the Athenæum behind him, is the best company on earth. Now, I like men and women alive, not sterilised. I don't want to be confined to the doctor and the parson and the ex-City people in red-brick villas."

"But you don't live in the country."

"I'm negotiating with Uncle Jack to take over Greys when he dies."

"Oh, I see!" said Denis, in a tone of sudden and complete enlightenment.

He had been wondering vaguely what Julian wanted out of Greys: he was aware from of old that Julian always had a direct line of action, however aimless he might appear: the mystery was now explained, and in a way which harmonised with all that Denis knew of his friend. There were a good many strands interwoven in Julian's nature, and one of the strongest was the fibre of acquisitiveness, the passion to have and to hold in perpetuity. Julian's eager grey eyes were covetously intent upon the grave old house, the home of his race, that lay out dwarfed by distance to a doll's house delicacy among its toy lawns below: it did not need words to assure Denis

that no life-tenancy would do for him, no rent or lease.

"You'll buy back the place from your cousin?"

"Yes, that's what I shall do."

"You don't like London?"

"I want to get the girls out of Bloomsbury Square."

"Then shall you settle down here yourself?"

"H'm. I'm not so sure of that. I want to own the place, my Denis, but I'm not so sure that I want to live in it."

"If I were you I should want to live in it and never go away."

"Oh, you would, would you?" said Julian, again examining his friend's features. "I'm hanged if I can make you out. Olive says you look like a Russian exile: and so you do when you say things like that."

Denis making no reply to this attack, there fell a short silence, during which Julian's gaze roamed over the wide prospect identifying old landmarks. A mile or so off in the wilder southern valley his glance lit at length on the crenelations of a high quadrangle, flanked by ash and beech woods; the sun struck a spark from its gilded vane, the distant stream was a ruffle of silver, the walls of fawn-coloured stone jutted out in their naked sternness over a plaitwork of branch and bud. South and west the broken country ranged away in tracts of heather and woody spurs, till it faded into coastal ridges, cape on cape, rounding into a silver rim.

"Hullo!" said Julian. "I forgot we could see it from here. That's Laleham Chase."

"I know."

"How do you know?"

"I've seen photographs of it."

"Oh," said Julian. He sighed, and Denis smiled, reading his companion's mind.

"What's the matter, Julian?"

"Oh, I'm not asking any questions!" Julian was digging holes again in the patient turf. "It's not your way to talk, it never was: you brood like an old hen over an addled clutch! Insanitary, I call it: but you're as God made you, and Saxon to the bone."

"But about me and them I am going to tell you."

Julian turned on him swiftly. "Are you? What's the odds I know already?"

"Oh no you don't, any more than your sister did: I don't exactly know what she did think, but she was on the wrong scent. Nobody could guess, it's much too odd and unlikely. The Lalehams are——"

"Quiet!" said Julian sharply.

He had heard a clatter of hoofs on the woodland road, and as he turned three riders came out of its shadow. walking their horses on the border of upland turf. All three were well mounted and well appointed in a well-worn, workmanlike way, and an indefinable family likeness, declaring itself across marked differences in form and colouring, implied them to be father, son, and daughter. The father was a handsome man, sparely built and fine of feature, whose vigorous bearing and easy seat in the saddle suggested that he was well under sixty, though his thick, curling hair was already white. Behind him rode a young man in grey, of very ordinary appearance, and at his side, managing a fretful Arab mare with a light and practised hand, a slight girl of four or five and twenty, remarkable chiefly for the circumstance that her hair was tumbling down. Julian had

known them all in his boyhood, but did not expect to be recognised across the gap between seventeen and thirty-two; and he was wondering whether to salute or no when he saw that Denis had risen to his feet, baring his head. All the riders looked at him in surprise, and the elder man raised two fingers to his cap, as if he were used to wayside greetings; but it was no light civility that animated those wistful, piercing eyes.

"What on earth did you do that for?" Julian exclaimed as the riders trotted off down hill. "How did you know who they were?"

"It was them, wasn't it?"

"It was Lord Laleham and Martin and Sophy—yes."

"My father, and my half-brother and sister."

"Good heavens, Denis!"

Denis was silent.

"Nonsense!"

"No, it is true."

"It can't be."

"It is, Julian. Should I say such a thing if I weren't sure?"

He had fairly struck the colour from Julian's face. "My dear old fellow, I'm sure you believe it, but it's simply out of the question. Your father deceived you."

"*That* was my father."

"No, no: your father was—forgive me, Denis: heaven alone knows why he put this ghastly notion into your head, but since he's done it there's nothing for it but to let you have the truth: I need not tell you that not another living soul will hear it from me—your father, I'm virtually certain, was Edward Delahay, Lord Laleham's cousin."

Denis nodded. "Go on."

"Who ran off with Lord Laleham's first wife."

"Yes—Viola Mostyn. She was only seventeen when Lord Laleham married her, and he was twenty-three. It was in June, and a son was born the April after. He was most awfully in love with her, but she never cared for him, and six months later she ran away with Mr Hay and took her baby with her. She told Lord Laleham it died on the voyage and he believed her. He divorced her at once, and she married Mr Hay, and they brought up Lord Laleham's child as their son. They never had one of their own. (Delahay I mean.) I am that child. I am Denis"—again he checked himself—"the Honourable Denis Henry Auberon Laleham."

"It can't be, Denis."

"I have plenty of proofs."

"You were Lady Laleham's son by her first husband?"

"Yes."

"And Lord Laleham is your father?"

"Yes."

"And Martin and Sophy——"

"Are my half-brother and sister. Lord Laleham wouldn't marry as long as my mother was alive, but she died when I was two, and then he did. I'm four years older than Martin Laleham."

"And Delahay kept you with him—you, a baby, the other man's son?"

"Don't you remember?" Denis murmured with an indefinable accent. "I was all he had left of her: and he loved her so."

Julian turned aside and took out his cigarette-case. That was the first moment when he began to wonder if

the strange tale could be true. Dramatic as a scene on a stage, there came into his memory that last night at Mollendo: the disorder of the half-lit room, the galvanised corpse of Edward Hay, his voice coming from the grave. Julian stood weighing the silver case in his hand, but he could not see it: he could not see the bright landscape before him for the nightmare horror of that unreconciled death.

"After all," Denis went on slowly, "it isn't that I want you to take my word for it. I've got papers. I've a letter from my mother to my father, written when she was dying, begging him to forgive her; and one from Mr Hay too, properly signed and witnessed. And there are people still living in Mollendo that can swear to Mr Hay's coming out there with his wife and baby, and that the baby didn't die and no other child was born. Mr Hay was a Roman Catholic—no, he never went to church, but that's what he was, only he wouldn't let me be one too, in fact he never wanted me to be anything—so the priests knew all about him. You see Mr Hay and my mother went straight from England to Mollendo, and lived there together till she died. (Delahay I mean.) It's such a little place, and everyone knows everyone. And Mr Hay always meant me to claim my rights in the end, so he took care to safeguard the chain of evidence all along."

"But did Lord Laleham take no step to verify the child's death?"

"No. Why should he? His wife said it was dead—me I mean—and I don't suppose it ever entered his head that she—that I wasn't."

"But why did she invent such a tale?"

"Because she was so afraid of his taking it—me—away from her, as of course he had a legal right to do. I expect he would have done it too, when I got a little older: he would have had to, because I was his heir. Not at first, because he was very young and it hit him awfully hard. Mr Hay said he was much too fond of her to do anything that would hurt her. But he hated Mr Hay. He was a passionate man, I expect: he looks it still, doesn't he? with those bright blue eyes. Mr Hay said if he'd caught him he'd have shot him."

"Was that, may I ask, the reason why Delahay went to Mollendo?"

Denis nodded soberly. "He ran away. He wasn't afraid, but my mother was, and he felt himself that after going off with his cousin's wife it would be rather too much of a joke to get him hanged for murder. Can't you, sort of, see it? They were all pretty young and they all took it hard because they all had a conscience. She couldn't stand living with Lord Laleham, all the more *because* he loved her, so she ran away. Then she couldn't stand living with a man she wasn't married to, so there was nothing left for her to do but die, and she died."

"But Delahay!"

"Him keeping me after she was dead? He daren't own up then, Lord Laleham could have had him put in prison. Besides, you know what he was like—you saw him at the end—how he couldn't even then stand having to let go of me, having to tell me I wasn't his and never had been . . ."

Julian did not reply at once: the mention of Edward Delahay's deathbed generally had power to evoke a silence.

"But if this is true——"

Denis raised his head and his manner stiffened suddenly.

"I beg your pardon: I know you believe it. But it's an incredible tale. Delahay was a born farceur, Denis."

"Not then. He quite broke down over telling me: cried like a child in my arms. It was the night you left. He said, could I ever forgive him. I couldn't, right off, because I always did hate Mollendo so, and I couldn't help grudging all he'd done me out of. I went out of the room and left him to Harrison. I was angry. I never did forgive him. Oh! Julian, you were there—you were there."

"Oh! well . . ." murmured Julian.

He was still trying to light his cigarette, and the moss under the beech tree was strewn with matches, which he had gone on striking as fast as the wind blew them out. He turned aside now and sheltered the flame with his hands, and soothed himself with a few whiffs before he spoke again.

"I suppose it is true. I'd like to see the papers if you don't mind: I should probably spot an irregularity sooner than you would. But I suppose it's true, though of all the queer tales I ever heard it is the queerest. It's so d——d unbusinesslike!" He gave an exasperated laugh. "But what I was going to say was that, assuming it's true, you're the elder son—the heir. Martin is disinherited."

"I'm afraid so."

"Hard lines on Martin."

"It needn't make much difference."

"Ah?—That's like you. Still you can't help turning him out of his place: when you appear Martin can't retain the succession to the title, and wouldn't if he could, by what I hear of him. I'm not struck on Martin, but he means well."

"I know, I know," Dennis answered wistfully. "I can't get out of the title, and I'm very much afraid a lot of the property is tied up too: perhaps we could what-you-may-call-it, undo the thingamajig, but Laleham Chase must go with the title, and that takes a lot of money to keep up. I'm very, very sorry. We must see what can be done. But in a case like this one can't think only of one's own likes and dislikes. One can't stand aside: one owes a duty to the House. One's only a link in a chain. If I am the elder son I am, and that's the long and short of it. Hadn't we better be getting on now? It's twenty past twelve, and your uncle said in his letter lunch at one."

This was evidently a motion to adjourn the debate, and Julian for once in his life was ready to accept it. Excess of ideas put him to silence. He could not shake off the memory of Edward Delahay on his deathbed, weeping and clinging to the man who had not a drop of Delahay blood in him—offspring of the man and woman whom Delahay had loved and wronged. And so it was Denis Laleham who stood waiting in the gay Dorsetshire sunlight, shabby and pale in his readymade clothes! Far in the valley below Lord Laleham was riding home with his son Martin, and here on the windy heights stood his dead son come to life again—with Mollendo, and its tavern

bar, and all Edward Delahay's convulsive passions crowded into his past!

"Take care, Denis," Julian suddenly laid his hand on Denis's arm. "Take care."

"Take care what of?"

The sun was striking down over the fawn-coloured towers of Laleham, beckoning them with its gold finger out of soft distance into a warm proximity. "No, you're right," said Julian: "you can't draw back."

"No, not even if I wanted to. It wouldn't be just. Besides, I don't want to." Denis added, following with his long-sighted eyes the riders in the valley. "You see, Julian, that's my home, where I was born; and those figures riding along the road down there are my father, and sister, and brother."

CHAPTER V

"So curious," said Sophy Laleham in her low voice: "those two men we met this morning: you tell mother, Martin, she scoffs at me——"

"We met two fellows none of us knew, when we were riding home down the hill road, and one of them raised his hat and the other followed suit. I was in two minds to pull up and ask them what they meant by it, but I didn't."

"What were they like?" asked Lady Laleham.

"Like a clerk, the fair one," said Sophy: "he had red hair and was a pale sandy colour all over. But the one I fell in love with was dark—as dark as a Spaniard. He was really very handsome. He had dark hair with a wave in it, and eyes like a black diamond."

"No doubt they recognized your father."

"Oh yes, I'm sure they knew all of us, but there was more in it than that. The fair one looked at us all so earnestly, as if he were taking us in from head to foot! It wasn't a mere courtesy salute."

"Why didn't you ask them to dinner?" said Lady Laleham. "I dare say they would have been very nice —Martin, how dare you laugh at your mother?" For unfilial merriment had greeted a suggestion which, however unconventional, was apparently made in good faith. "I am sure one would rather dine with a chimney-sweep than sit down face to face with one's own family five nights out of seven!"

"That is Sophy's fault not mine," said Martin. "But

by the way, now I come to think of it, why didn't we ask them to dinner? It's high time we got Sophy off our hands."

The Lalehams ought to have been in town: that they were not was due to Sophy, who had distinguished herself during the previous autumn by getting in and out of an engagement to a person of some political importance. No one was ever told what had happened, but it was commonly reported that Sophy's troth was given after an able speech on the beetroot question, and withdrawn the first time Mr Middleton tried to kiss her: she herself was callous but incommunicative, and Mr Middleton still more so; and the upshot of it was that Lady Laleham said she couldn't face her friends till it had blown over, and the family remained at Laleham Chase and were all very grateful to Sophy.

It will be seen that the Lalehams were not fashionable people. Since his second marriage Lord Laleham had spent most of his life at the Chase, cultivating his garden both literally and metaphorically. He was not rich, even as riches went before the war, but he was comfortably off, for he had few expensive tastes, and his wife was a lover of the country, who reared chickens and bred cattle, and—what is rarer—made them pay. Friends were welcome at the Chase, but of the chance-medley of a house-party Lady Laleham was impatient: she had her own interests, and they left her little time for desultory acquaintance.

Even when the children grew up, little change followed. Too sensible to be eccentric, Lady Laleham resigned herself to Sophy's seasons in town, but Sophy was no trouble; she had the knack of living in the world, and there were

always friends or relations ready to take her off her mother's hands. Too ready by half, for Sophy's taste! She dressed and dined and danced, and adapted herself to the claims of Mayfair with the natural tact of an easy-going disposition, but she remained at heart a country girl—a lover of fresh air and a stretching gallop. Martin was even less of an ornament to society. He went into the Guards: it was a tradition that the heir of Laleham should go into the Guards: but the social duties of a Guardsman bored him so profoundly that at six and twenty he resigned his commission and came home to look after the property. This was not in his case a euphemism for idleness, for Lord Laleham, Conservative to the bone, held feudal views of the obligations of a great landlord, so that Martin had his hands full. But it was hardly the post for an ambitious man. The Laleham parents at times eyed their children ruefully, as a sophisticated hen might eye a duckling fosterchild which refused after all to take to the water.

It was evening, and Lady Laleham and her son and daughter had foregathered in the library in the pleasant hour before dinner. All was dark in the dusk of a spring nightfall but for the dance of flames on the great hearth. Panel and bookcase, Boule cabinet and marquetry table loomed out of the dimness, their gilt vineleaves or latticed brasswork rosy with fugitive sparkles where those flickering fingers touched them. Rosy shone the firelight too on Lady Laleham's pile of white hair, on the ruddy silk of her dress, and on the rubies at her throat. Tall, dark, and weather-beaten, she was not handsome, but it was an able, kindly face, and wherever she went—under the lamps of a London crush, or out among her pig-sties in a tweed

suit and shooting boots—she carried about with her the same atmosphere of powerful good humour. The dairyman who stole her eggs, the cook who sent soup cold to table, the idle, the dishonest, the incompetent of every class had sharp justice—though not till Lady Laleham had listened patiently to all they had to say for themselves.

Martin lounged in the window: a pleasant easy-going young man, slight of build, dark of colouring, nondescript of features. At his feet lay a small white-and-brown smooth-coated fox terrier, a lovable plebeian of no value but to her owner. His errant sister was sitting on a tigerskin before the fire, pensively gazing into the flames. Sophy was always late, rarely neat, and not much better-looking than her brother: but Sophy's maid was French, and Sophy herself, with her small head and cloud of brown hair, and her milk-white neck relieved against the dark and changeable gloss of her gown—Sophy was individual in spite of her colourlessness, and ineffaceably elegant.

"Jane!" said Miss Laleham. The little dog opened one eye and pricked one ear. "Jane dear, little dogs that prick one ear are stuck all over with sticking plaster and tied with elastic under their chin." Jane, who disliked persiflage, shuffled herself an inch nearer Martin's foot, snuffled a sigh through her nose, and fell asleep again. "Oh, here's father. Father, who *were* those men we passed on the hill road?"

"You look very cosy in here," said Lord Laleham, leaning over his wife's chair. "Those men? I cannot say, my dear. One of them reminded me of somebody—I cannot think whom."

"Oh, which—the handsome, grey-eyed one?"

"I cannot speak to his eyes, Sophy, but I should not call him handsome. He had fair hair inclining to red——"

"Red? But that's the other one! Now, how odd! Were you reminded of anyone, Martin?"

"No," said Martin placidly. This was not true, for Julian had recalled to his memory one whom he knew, poor Martin! only too well, but he kept his own counsel, and to escape from Sophy's pertinacity he changed the subject. "I had a letter from George Danvers to-night, sir: rather amusing: I was mystified, till I opened it, by the London postmark."

"Written from Berlin?"

"Written from Berlin, but posted from Victoria. He has had a friend staying with him, and seized the chance to send over a sheaf of private correspondence without trusting it to the German post, of which he's devoutly suspicious. He's convinced they mean mischief."

"One seems to have heard that before," said Lord Laleham, mildly sarcastic. "But when? George can't tell us that, I suppose."

"He is selling out his Austrian securities," said Martin: "it is as near as that, and George is no scaremonger. There's a great deal going on under the surface. Lascelles won't take it seriously."

"But who takes Mark Lascelles seriously?" said Lady Laleham. "He has lived so long in Berlin that he's half German himself and believes whatever they tell him."

"If it is coming at all I wish it would come in my time," remarked Sophy. "I've always envied people who lived in the days of the Armada."

"It will all blow over," said Lord Laleham. "Sorry

to disappoint you, my dear, but there is no nation that would be mad enough to plunge into such a sea of bloodshed as a European war."

"N-no: still, suppose it really came," said Sophy in the pensively abstracted tone in which one discusses a journey to the moon, "I wonder would it make much difference? Prices would go up with a run—they did in 1870: we should none of us have any new clothes. Travelling would be difficult, at least in France and Germany: dear me, I suppose one wouldn't be able to go to Germany at all! What would Cook's do? One couldn't run Continental excursions with the German fleet banging about in the Channel! Martin would go back to his regiment——"

"No, he wouldn't," said Martin flatly. "Nothing would induce me to rejoin. War is a method of barbarism, and the rifle will soon be as obsolete as the tomahawk. Do not you make any mistake about that, Sophy: you can have your war if you like, but I shall decline to be mixed up in it."

"Oh, very well: only you'll sing rather small when the Guards are ordered to the front and you can't go too."

"Not at all: I shall be deeply relieved. Why should I go and shoot Germans? The average German is quite as good a man as I am and I haven't the slightest desire to shoot him."

"I," said Sophy, "shall join the Women's Convoy Corps. Susie Lancashire says it's much better fun than ordinary Red Cross work. They rehearse going out to the field of battle under fire to pick up the wounded. The drawback is that you mayn't carry arms: and it's not much fun being shot at if you can't shoot back."

"Susie is an optimist," said Lady Laleham. "No British military organization will ever let a woman come within range of the guns."

"No, indeed," said Lord Laleham gravely. "Even in these degenerate days, I hope we are not so lost to all sense of chivalry as that."

"But——!"

Sophy caught Lady Laleham's glance and its profound humour checked her. Among the burdens bound on women, none is harder to bear than the kindness of unimaginative men. One cannot argue with an attitude of mind! Sophy however was young and had not yet been drilled into her mother's saddened philosophy. Years go on, men's thoughts change, new forces come into operation: Grace Laleham might bend her strong shoulders to the yoke, but for the slight untried Sophy it lay in the order of natural evolution to revolt.

"Father, that's cruel," she said, looking up at Lord Laleham with her fearless eyes. "That makes me feel that I simply must fly a little flag. Of course there won't be any war, but if there were you would cut Martin off with a shilling, you know you would, if he didn't rejoin: and I'm as much a Laleham as Martin is, and a great deal more patriotic! Women can't fight, but wouldn't you even let us risk our lives?"

"My dear, you don't know what you're talking about." Lord Laleham was slightly impatient of argument from his daughter. "You don't know what a modern battlefield would be like. No lady could face it: the horrors would turn your little brain. Let us all pray that we may be spared the sight of it in our time, for I fear—I fear—with all this Labour unrest we should have little

cause to be proud of our country. Never mind, Jane my dear, you're not being scolded." The little dog, sensible of a vibration in the air, had walked slowly towards the fire and was looking up at him with her human brown eyes. "Get her a biscuit, Sophy, there are some inside that bookcase. There, there, Jinny! who wants a biscuit?"

"And get one for yourself at the same time," said Lady Laleham, who was not always able to restrain her sarcasm when she knew it would not be remarked. "You are like Jane, my dear—you require soothing."

She stood up, stretching out a large hand to her daughter. "Come: papa wants to be quiet, and there will just be time before dinner for me to get off my notes for Saturday, if you'll help me. Since you're so full of energy, my child, you may as well make yourself useful."

Martin held the door open for his mother and sister to pass out, then dropped back into his chair. He and his father were on excellent terms. Now and again Lord Laleham—a trifle too eloquent for a literary taste—set his son's teeth on edge, but as a rule they were very well content in their mutual relation. "Thank Heaven, my boy has no secrets from me," Lord Laleham used to murmur when other men bewailed to him their sons' vagaries. "Never wilfully gave me a day's trouble in his life." He honestly believed that he could read Martin like a book This evening for some time both men remained silent, Martin smoking, Lord Laleham absently pulling Jane's ears. (Jane hated to have her ears pulled, but she was a polite little dog and affected to be grateful.)

"I can't get George's note out of my mind," Martin said at length, and abruptly. "Strange to think war

may come after all, and in spite of Lascelles and all the other old women in and out of the Ministry. George, by the way, agrees with Sophy: he hopes it will come in our time."

"Ah, he likes fighting."

"And you—dislike dust."

"Perhaps I do," smiled Lord Laleham. "It is a weakness I don't share with the modern generation. Even Sophy, you see, is militant."

"Sophy always was fond of a scrap."

"A what?"

"S-c-r-a-p, a small row."

"I did not catch what you said," observed Lord Laleham with dignity. "Sophy talks a great deal of nonsense; if I thought she meant half of it I should be very vexed."

"I expect she means it all."

"Do not you encourage her in it then. Depend upon it, the beaten way is the safe way for a woman. Sophy has a better headpiece than many a man" (Martin opened his eyes: what would Sophy have said to that?) "but the wisest women are liable to be led astray by their feelings. I can't bear to hear a woman making light of social obligations. That's the way Viola began; and see how she ended——!"

He broke off, a bright flush coming into his cheeks. Martin was astounded: he had never heard that name on his father's lips before. Now in one flash of illumination he realized how deeply Viola's ways and Viola's end had influenced Lord Laleham's view of the relations between men and women. Martin was reticent, however, and not by the flicker of an eyelash did he betray his great surprise.

"I have often thought," he said quietly, "how bitter that affair must have been to you with your dislike of vulgarity."

"Vulgarity!"

Martin was again startled, for there was keen pain in Lord Laleham's sensitive voice. "My dear boy, don't let me hear from you that cant of the fashionable play. If there is a trick I dislike it is this modern habit of glossing over vile sins with smooth names. Adultery is not vulgar. No, no: the chatter and gossip made me feel very sore, I confess, but all that was only a pinprick compared with the dreadful burden of sin and shame."

"But you were guiltless."

"But she was not."

To that Martin had no more to say, and a silence fell which he hoped would be permanent, but his father had not yet shaken off his strange impulse to confidence.

"May you be more fortunate than I was, my son, till your dear mother made up to me for all Viola made me suffer. Yes, I did suffer, for I loved her, and, though it may sound like an affectation for me to say so, I was fond of Edward too; he was like a brother to me, till I found out how meanly, how treacherously he had wronged me. He was wise to leave England. My blood was hot then, and if I had reached Liverpool Docks half an hour earlier I should have shot him on the quay . . . *Vulgarity!*"

"I am sorry," Martin schooled himself to repeat in his most gentle and sympathetic manner. In reality he felt nothing but a paralysis of discomfort and an overpowering desire to escape. This was one of the occasions when his father's eloquence offended every nerve in his taste.

Parents would as a rule do better to confide in their butlers than in their children, for the gulf in sentiment and expression is wider between one generation and another than between class and class. Fortunately however Martin was a dutiful son, and when Lord Laleham brought his rambling reflections to a close he had no idea that within the last twenty minutes he had reduced all his family to seeking shelter in flight.

"Well, well! It was a bitter experience, but it's over now, and what made me bring it up to-day I don't know: one often can't tell what it is that has touched a chord in the mind. It belongs to the dead and buried past, and my past, thank Heaven, is not likely to have any resurrection. —Yes, what is it, John?"

He took the card which was handed to him.

"Denis Hay—who is Mr Denis Hay? I don't know the name. Ask him to come in here."

"Probably some begging-letter impostor," said Martin, seizing his chance to stroll out of the room. "Hi, Jane! shall we go and join the ladies? Come along, old girl, that flea will keep for a more convenient season——"

He broke off and drew back to let Denis pass him in the doorway. They were so near together that Denis's shabby tweed brushed against the sleeve of Martin's dinner jacket, and in acceptance of Martin's courteous apology Denis turned and smiled into his brother's eyes.

CHAPTER VI

Martin strolled off whistling an air from *La Cigale*, and Denis came forward into the great library, still half dark, though the man-servant was lighting the candles set in silver sconces above the chimneypiece. Rich and dim in leaping flamelight, the high storied windows darkening with their painted panes the vague glooms of a March dusk, the room was like nothing that Denis had ever seen; and in a flying memory of the fonda's flaring lamps he had a warning of the gulf that lay between his past life and Laleham Chase. "But this is my own home," he said to himself, and steadying his nerves against that remembrance he approached his father, who waited by the fireside, courteous and gravely smiling, a handsome figure in his velvet coat and much in keeping with his surroundings.

"Good evening, Mr May."

"Good evening."

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you." Denis dropped into the chair which Lord Laleham pushed towards him, but found himself on his feet again in a moment. "No, thank you, I'd rather stand."

Lord Laleham looked a little surprised, but his kindly manner did not vary. He saw that his guest was tongue-tied, and inferred that Denis, a stranger and poorly dressed, was frightened by his environment and perhaps by the presence of a man of rank. Lord Laleham was the most unaffected of peers and himself constitutionally

shy, but he had not lived to fifty-nine without finding out that if, as a man, he was afraid of other people, as a lord they were often afraid of him.

"There was something you wanted to see me about?"

"Yes. I'm sorry I'm so late. I came this afternoon, but you were out."

"I'm sorry you should have been obliged to come twice. But perhaps you're staying in the neighbourhood?"

"Yes. At Greys."

"Oh, are you?" said Lord Laleham, and Denis saw, though only by a very fine shade of manner, that this mention of Greys had produced a bad effect. There was a slight, faint touch of insistency in the question that followed.

"Well, Mr May, what is there I can do for you?"

"Nothing—that is—I've just come over from South America . . ."

"Oh dear me," Lord Laleham sighed to himself, "he's been in some scrape or other and wants me to pay his passage back. What am I to say to him? He seems a nice young fellow enough if he were not so painfully awkward. Really I wish one hadn't any principles about indiscriminate charity!"

"From South America? You've had a long journey."

"I came over to see you."

Every morning on his breakfast table Lord Laleham found three or four communications which opened in this strain. Recognising the common cant of the begging-letter writer, he was a little disappointed in Denis. "You came all the way from South America to see me?" he repeated, drily amused. "That was very flattering of you."

Nothing but dogged perseverance carried Denis on, for he knew now that he was going into deep waters. He was afraid of every word spoken, of every shade of expression that crossed his father's face. In the thousand times that he had rehearsed their interview, the one contingency that he had never foreseen was this of his own personal incompetence and shyness. Lord Laleham's detached and dreamy courtesy—the courtesy of a superior to an inferior—held him at a distance which but for the inherited obstinacy in his blood he would never have dared to cross.

"Don't you remember my name?"

"May?"

"Hay."

"I beg your pardon, so it was. But I don't think I've ever had the pleasure——"

"You knew my father— You knew Mr Edward Delahay."

Lord Laleham pushed back his chair and got up.

"Mr Edward Delahay was your father?"

"Yes—that is——"

"Leave the house."

"—connected with me."

"Leave the house."

"Lord Laleham!"

"Mr Delahay's name is not a passport to Laleham."

"You don't understand——"

"Nor wish to. Do you want money? You shall have it. But I can't continue this interview."

Lord Laleham's face was bloodless and he leant his hand on the table as if he were feeling faint. Denis on the contrary had drawn himself up into a military

straightness: an attack so unjust had cured him of all inclination to retreat.

"I can't go yet. You must hear me out."

"If you have a personal message for me, give it and have done with it. But unless it is indispensably private I should prefer that you communicate with my lawyers. I may add that you won't lose by doing so. I'll instruct them to agree to anything in reason to help you."

"I don't want money."

"What is it you want, then?—Come," said Lord Laleham, softening before the young man's evident distress, "I don't wish to be hard on anyone. You are—what relation, must I suppose, to Mr Delahay?"

"None at all."

"But just now——"

"You muddled me up so that I didn't know what I was saying. Oh, this is dreadful!" Denis burst out. It should have been easy to pronounce the few plain words that would make all clear, but they stuck in his throat. "I'll go away and come again to-morrow. No, that's cowardly. Wait a minute. Please believe that I didn't come here to borrow money. It's you I want—your recognition—your—your—you to be friends with me——"

Lord Laleham's hand went to the bell.

"Are you going to have me turned out? Don't. You'll make an awful mess of things if you make a scandal. I'm . . ."

"Well, sir?"

"Your son," said Denis baldly.

"*What?*"

"Your elder son."

Lord Laleham dropped his hand with an audible gasp

of relief. "Perhaps we had better sit down and talk this over quietly. You would like a cup of coffee, wouldn't you? I'll have something sent in for you, and then you shall tell me all about it."

"I'm not mad."

"But what you say is impossible. I—" Lord Laleham smiled and coloured faintly—"there is no one who can claim that of me except my son Martin. You may perhaps have been misled."

"I can prove it."

"Oh well," the voice was courteous again but touched with weariness or disgust, "please explain yourself then."

"It's as simple—! You remember your first wife?"

"*Do I remember——?*"

"Oh no, no!" Denis cried out, stumbling among the difficult phrases, which were made so much more difficult by Lord Laleham's renewed and uncontrollable agitation. "Oh, forgive me—how can I help hurting you?"

"Never mind about that. Go on, sir."

"Your first wife, when she left England, took her child —your child with her. Afterwards you were told it was dead, but it never did die. I'm that child—your son Denis."

"You pretend that Lady Laleham deceived me?"

"She was afraid you would claim the right of custody."

"I claimed nothing from Lady Laleham, and she knew it."

"The Court awarded you the guardianship of it—of me."

"Isn't it rather late in the day for you to assert this claim?"

"I've only just found out. My father—" Denis broke off.

"You have a truthful tongue," said Lord Laleham grimly.

"Mr Delahay brought me up to believe he was my father. When he was dying he told me the truth: that was last December."

"He's dead then—where did he die?"

"In Mollendo, in Peru: where he was all along."

"What was he doing out there?"

"He kept what people here call a public house," said Denis. Reading his own words in the light of Lord Laleham's expressive eyes, he tried to take them back, or at least to modify their uncompromising harshness. "A —a sort of hotel. It was a very respectable place—at least, it was more respectable than most of them are out there. It was a big place. He—he made it pay."

"Edward Delahay—my cousin Edward Delahay kept a public house!"

"He—he was very much respected. People don't think of those things out there as they do over here."

"Evidently not," said Lord Laleham. "However, even in Peru I doubt if you would find many men of Mr Delahay's antecedents keeping an inn. I was afraid he had sunk pretty low, but— And where, may I ask, were you? Did you live with him in this respectable public house?"

"Yes."

"Serving in the bar perhaps?"

"Only when we were very busy."

"Delahay let you—his son—*her* son—serve in the bar? He brought you up to that?"

"I wasn't brought up at all. After my mother died we lived anyhow. I never had any proper education, only what he taught me himself. When I was sixteen he got me a job in a shipping office on the quay, but I went on living with him."

"Had you no one who could have helped you?"

"I didn't want any help."

"Oh ah, no: to be sure, you would be perfectly satisfied. Indeed, if you were brought up as a barman, the post of clerk in a shipping office—you were a clerk, were you? not a porter? you can read and write?—a clerkship would be a rise for you in the social scale. I dare say you had plenty of friends in Mollendo."

"No, I never had any friends till Julian Charnwood came out. He was the only English gentleman we ever knew."

" 'The only gentleman'—dear, dear! Well, Mr Hay, I've met this gentleman friend of yours. No doubt he can corroborate as much as is true of your story—if any of it is true: a good deal of it sounds plausible enough, for it is too dreary, too squalid to be an invention. Does Mr Charnwood know of this—what shall I call it? this claim of yours?"

"I told him this morning after we met you on the hill road."

"And he advised you to proceed with it?"

"He didn't advise me one way or the other. I didn't ask him to."

"The more's the pity. But without being asked Mr Charnwood would have done better to save me from this very painful and very unnecessary interview."

Denis thought so too: why had not Julian warned him?

But there recurred to his memory certain hints let fall, certain intonations in Julian's flexible voice, which might have served as a warning if he had been less blindly preoccupied with his own train of thought.

"Well," said Lord Laleham after a very long silence, "if you persist in your claim, it becomes a matter for our lawyers to discuss. In the mean while you won't expect me, will you, to take much notice of either it or you? Frankly, the sooner you relieve me of your company, Mr—er—Hay, the better I shall be pleased."

He sat down again as he spoke, and Denis saw that in spite of his easy insolence of manner he was trembling too much to keep his feet. Lord Laleham had reached an age when violent agitation cannot be suffered with impunity. He looked ten years older for the last half-hour. And at sight of that handsome bowed head Denis's heart gave way: he felt what all generous natures feel on discovering that their gain involves another man's loss.

Although in coming to Laleham Denis had behaved with extraordinary simplicity, he was shrewd as a rule, and too sensitive not to sympathise with every throb of his father's pain. On a proud man like Lord Laleham, desertion and betrayal, not to speak of the branding publicity of the trial, must have left such scars as never heal. Time and death had interposed their merciful statute of limitations, another wife reigned in the dead woman's place and other children in the room of the firstborn, thirty years of little daily cares and joys had lulled the snake Memory asleep, and now without warning the dead had come to life again, dragging to light

> a lamentable tale of things
> Done long ago, and ill done. . . .

If this were all, what welcome could the ghost hope for? It was not all. Deep, deep below all surface hurts Lord Laleham carried his mortal wound. Those of the new life, even Martin, who had more than he liked of his father's confidence, were ignorant of it, but Denis divined it because his own being was rooted in the past. Training, breeding, manners, dress combined to set him so far away from the master of Laleham Chase that on first coming into the room he had twice called Edward Delahay his father, but the confusion was dispelled by the evocation of Viola: riches and external good manners are after all transitory: love and grief and death are real: and these it was that Denis and his father had in common. Lord Laleham had loved his young bride: heaven pity him, after the anguish and shame of betrayal and the consolation of a long and happy second marriage, in his undisciplined secret heart he loved that ill-starred beauty still.

Denis was what Julian would have called a sentimentalist and not a business man. In the deep wistful tenderness which came over him at sight of his father's grief, he forgot that to go from Laleham unacknowledged was to go without name, without kindred, and without resources. His only valid defence against pity was a passion for abstract truth; and pity was dangerously strong. All his life, except in one tragic instance, Lord Laleham had had the power of inspiring affection, but it was an affection in which the protective element was marked: his wife and Martin and even Sophy all acted more or less consciously on the rule that Lord Laleham must not be worried, and now Denis found himself drawn into the same conspiracy. Anger was no protection, for he was

not angry. He was too humble-minded to be stung by a sneer at his want of breeding. How simple it would be to go away, and how wretched it would make Lord Laleham if he stayed! Yet it was hard, hard to go. . . .

The clock ticked on: a gust of wind wailed against the windowpanes: a charred log turned over into a golden cavern, a whirl of gold sparks flew or settled in the wide chimney. The room was so quiet that he could hear its furniture creak and rattle, as old furniture will, as though dead and gone Lalehams were rising up and sitting down in their chairs. His eyes filling with tears, Denis laid a gentle hand on Lord Laleham's arm. "Father——"

"At least spare me this, sir!"

"Oh don't!" said Denis brokenly: "after all, if I *am* your son——"

Lord Laleham was a hot-tempered man. He sprang up at bay, his jaded nerves betraying him into recklessness. "Now that's enough, as long as you keep up this impudent pretence,I'll not hear another word. Own that you're Delahay's illegitimate son——"

"Illegitimate—*me?*"

"Of course, do you think me such a simpleton as to be taken in by any trumped-up tale? If you got what you deserved you would be turned out of the house, but I spare you for your father's sake. Own your fraud and I'll pay your passage back to America, and fifty pounds to keep you while you're looking for another billet—which I don't advise you to throw up again."

"Are you bribing me?"

"No, sir. I don't bribe blackguards of your class: I kick them out first and give them a sovereign after-

wards. I am not at all an easy subject for blackmail, Mr Hay. If you stick to your story, I'll fight it in every court. Have you money enough for that?" He looked Denis up and down with an insolence which would have made the blood tingle in a tramp. "Judging by appearances, I should suppose not."

"Aren't there lawyer firms that will take up a case for nothing if they're promised to be paid double if they win?"

"You will not find any firm disreputable enough to take up your case."

"What is my case? you don't know. Shall I show you? I've a letter from Mr Delahay in my pocket, which you can read now if you like. You won't? Well, you are a coward."

Denis stood with feet apart and hands thrust deep into his pockets, a lean athletic figure in dangerous fighting trim. All his embarrassment had fallen from him: his speech, so slow and bald as a rule, came rapid and telling and hard.

"If you treat me as an enemy I will be your enemy. And Martin, my half-brother, wasn't that him that went out of the room as I came in? he looks straightforward, but so do you, and I suppose he'll be like you, he'll think only of his own interests. So then I shall too. I was going to offer to undo the entail, but I shan't now. I'll take every penny I can get, I'll beggar him if I can."

Lord Laleham, who had fallen into his chair again, shook as if with palsy.

"And then there's Sophy: but I won't be hard on her. When I'm Lord Laleham there'll always be room for her at Laleham Chase."

"You have papers?"

"Proofs. When you've read them, or your solicitor, you won't offer me half a crown to go away."

"Will you take £1000?"

"For the Chase? You like doing things cheaply, don't you?"

"You may pre-decease me, in which case you won't get a penny."

"Can't I raise money on my expectations?"

"Name your own figure."

"And now you're trying to compound a felony."

"Name your own figure."

Denis laughed out. He had reached that white heat of anger when the obligations of ordinary life are fused and have no binding power. "By God! though you are my father, I wonder I don't hit you. What on earth do you mean by insulting me like this? I never did you any harm. I've seen men shot for less. But what's the good of going on? *You'll* never understand. I'm sick of this. —Here, you: if you're so keen on making me a present, I owe Julian ten pounds and I may as well pay it; you owe me thousands and thousands, all the money you've ever given to Martin ought to have been mine by rights." He stretched out his hand, and Lord Laleham opened his pocketbook and took from it the four or five notes it contained, and with them all the loose money that he had in his pocket.

"Will you go now?"

"Twenty-nine pounds eleven and fourpence. Well, I never would have believed you would be such a coward.

"Queer it'll look, won't it, when this comes out in court?"

Denis's mouth was dry and his eyes were smarting: he felt light-headed, and under the veneer of his cold self-possession he had lost all grasp of his own behaviour. He was used to being told that he was slow and stupid and underbred. But to be called a liar! to be offered a bribe! —Considering how much dishonesty there is in the world, it is strange how keenly men continue to resent that form of insult. As for Lord Laleham, the irony of Denis's last stroke, lighting up his own moral disintegration, had been too much for him: he leaned his head on his hands as if stunned.

"Did you never forget my mother," said Denis, "that you hate me like this?"

"The worst wrong she ever did me," Lord Laleham murmured under his breath: "worse than the first. Oh Viola, Viola, is there never to be any escape from you?"

He covered his face with his hands. His son watched him for a moment with no revival of pity, but it was growing late, the interview had lasted long enough, and when he found that Lord Laleham had nothing more to say Denis quietly left the room.

CHAPTER VII

"Martin, can I come in?"

"No."

"Pig! I shall."

"So I supposed."

Sophy opened the door and stuck her head round it. The day was fine and Martin had been up at seven to bathe, but he was now immersed in affairs, sitting at his desk knee-deep in files and forms and elevations. "Are you really busy? What are you doing?"

"Studying Kenyon's estimates for the new cottages at Laverock. Mill swears they're Greek to him."

"And are they Greek to you?"

"No—Æneid I or thereabouts. Mill sticks it on because he is a case-hardened reactionary and doesn't believe in making the lower classes comfortable. I've a good mind to make you get them up yourself, just to annoy him. I quite think you could do it with a little coaching."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Sophy, refusing to be drawn. She leant over Martin's shoulder and rubbed her cheek up and down his sleeve. "I hope they all have baths, h. and c. Martin, my dear friend, I'll help you with those estimates this afternoon if you'll take me up the river now."

Martin looked first out of the window, which framed a square of soft blue sky netted in sungilt beech buds, and then at his watch; he had been at work for three hours, and spring is a season of charm. He knew too

that Sophy's offer of help was to be taken seriously, for she was a quick and exact copyist, while her acute though indolent mind worked well so long as she had a superior to direct her energies. The truth was that Lord Laleham's children ought to have been born poor, for they liked work —good plain drudgery; nothing but reluctance to steal the bread out of George Mill's mouth kept Martin from formally taking over his job. But there it was—Mill was the professional, Martin only an amateur and far from indispensable: half unwillingly he owned that there was no reason why he should not escort Sophy up the river.

"I wonder if the trout are rising," he said, taking down his rod. "I've a new fly I want to try, that Philip Smith swears by. Suppose I get out at the beech grove, you can pick me up on your way back if you feel energetic."

"All right," agreed Sophy, who was throwing predatory eyes on Martin's cushions. "Let's punt, shall we? I've got on an old frock."

The remark was entirely relevant, for Sophy poled very badly. In her white serge and Panama hat she gave every promise of efficiency, but appearances were deceitful, and their progress downstream was fitful and zigzag. Martin lay down flat on his cushions and lit a cigarette. "I wish you wouldn't walk up and down the pole like that. Why can't you do it properly?" he said in a fretful voice. "You scull pretty well and you're—mercifully—a very good swimmer. Why is it that when you get a punt pole in your hands you always want all the river to yourself?"

"Don't—know," said Sophy, panting a little and

standing with her small feet wide apart as the pole trailed away behind her. "Mind your—face—we're running into a bramble."

"We shall have to have the banks cleared if this sort of thing goes on." Martin pushed the boat off with a paddle. "Come off the deck, you remind me of a beetle on a pin."

"I'm better than I was last year," said Sophy injured. "Oh, did I splash? I'm so sorry." Martin wiped his face and said nothing. "Shove her off, please, we're going into the mud and it's all nettles. Have you seen father this morning?"

"Not since breakfast. Why?"

"Mother says he had a bad night, a very bad one, he never went to sleep at all."

"Really? I thought he was looking rather washed out when he came down. What's worrying him?"

"Mother can't think: unless it was the man that came last night."

"From the glimpse I had of him I should say he was a perfectly inoffensive person. Shall I take her through the bridge? . . . Sophy, if it were possible to capsize a tub like this——!"

"The river's so muddy just here, I keep getting the pole stuck in the bottom."

"You'll stick in the bottom yourself if you don't come off that deck. Keep her out of the current. I suppose you know it was the same man that we saw on the hill road?"

"Which—the grey-eyed one? O joy!" exclaimed Sophy. In her enthusiasm she came within an ace of losing her pole altogether, but recovered her balance,

and tried to look as if nothing could have been further from her thoughts. "What's he like?"

"I do not know, I did not speak to him, it was the one with red hair. Why are you so extremely curious about the grey-eyed one?—if he is grey-eyed; I have an open mind on that point."

"I don't know—shove her off, please—I liked his face. I wish this river weren't so wrigglesome."

"You like to do the wriggling yourself?—I'll get out here, if you don't mind," said Martin, laying hold of the roots of an elm tree under which Sophy had propelled the punt with a vigorous stroke that rammed its bow deep into the bank. "There's a famous old fellow that lives in that pool over there and I should like to try Philip's flies on him."

Sophy sniffed. "On a blazing hot morning like this with the sun on the water!"

"You may be hot: I'm not. I'm getting very wet."

Sophy pouted, but her brother was not to be won over, and scrambled out, rod, flies, cushions, and all. "You can come back for me when you've had enough exercise: or if the fish don't rise I may stroll slowly on and catch you up."

"Another insult!" sighed Sophy, but she was unable to dispute its justice, for they had travelled at a very leisurely pace. She left him on the bank and shot away pursued by sarcastic advice: the last Martin saw of her, she was apparently about to fall into the water in an attempt to wave defiance at him with the dripping pole. Sophy however could swim like a fish, and Martin settled to his angling without feeling any anxiety as to her fate.

It was an old-fashioned first of April, clear and beautifully coloured, the light curl clouds of spring flowering like white rosebuds out of a blue expanse of sky:

> "White butterflies in the air,
> White daisies prank the ground,
> Cherry and hoary pear
> Scatter their snow around."

Sophy, who had a very small voice, warbled this ditty in undertones as she drifted on through the lonely sun-steeped valley—one of those narrow and winding valleys that Dorset and Devon people call combes; forest glades coming down to the water's edge, and alders interlacing overhead their bronze branches, flower-studded: larch trees high on a green shelf, holding close in rank like a troop of black cavaliers: wide and grassy reaches where a grey dew still lay like frost in the thick woodland shadow. Sophy wandered on content, taking first one bank and then another, for the river was deserted, so that she was free to fall into whatever Assyrian attitudes she pleased. But suddenly, swinging round a woody point, she saw not twenty yards off a sculling boat with a couple of men in her. Sophy hastily brought her feet together and shaded her eyes with her hand. She had a premonition that she was going to see again the strangers of the day before. . . . "It *is* them," she murmured in the tone of one resigning herself to destiny.

They were close inshore, Denis resting on his oars, while Julian, in the stern, fiddled with a tangled rudder-line; and the bend of the stream was so wide that Sophy reckoned on having room in it for all possible gyrations.

But only sad experience knows how long a punt can make itself in unskilful hands when it is being swung round a corner. When the boat was well under weigh—and not till then—Sophy realised that she was steering straight for the overhanging limb of an elder tree, which would necessarily scrape her off the deck as one scrapes a crumb from a cloth. It was too high for her to climb over it and too bushy for her to crawl under it, and she had not time to sit down amidships. The worst part of such a mishap is that one can see it coming. There was nothing whatever to be done. Sophy was perfectly composed: she called out to Denis "Don't come in too, please, I can swim," and with the last word she was pressed against the twigs. The boat travelled on, but Sophy could not travel on; she walked slowly and unwillingly off the deck into the water.

She was so unaffectedly calm that neither Julian nor Denis followed her: Julian indeed had not seen what was going on till Denis's horrified expression and Sophy's heavy splash made him wheel round. But when thirty seconds had gone by and Sophy had not risen, Denis—readier than Julian for once, because less taken by surprise—leapt to his feet. He did not even wait to throw off coat or boots: after living all his life on a seashore he knew how swift are the treacheries and tragedies of the water.

Sophy had not bargained for the tangle of elder fibres under the bank. They parted under her weight when she went in, and when she tried to rise again she found herself pinned by an ankle. With the stubborn courage of her breeding she was still holding her breath and weakly trying to free herself when a man's hand, grasp-

ing a pocket knife, shot by her through the green gloom . . . and after that she lost consciousness till she found herself lying on the grass and Julian bending over her. She blinked up at him, heard his devout "Thank God!" and shut her eyes again.

"Shall I go for a doctor?" Denis asked.

"No, she's coming to. She is all right, Denis, I saw her eyelids flicker. Aren't you all right, Miss Laleham? Try to pull round, you've given us such a scare."

"I'm sorry," murmured Sophy, answering like a thoroughbred to the spur.

She opened her eyes again, and after a moment raised herself on her arm, but the meadows were swimming round her and the sun was a dazzle of gold. Gradually however her mind cleared and she was able to distinguish the anxious eyes of Denis and the handsome, white, set face of Julian Charnwood: and then she realized that she had been pulled out of the river by the strangers of the hill road, and was lying with loosened dress on Julian's arm, and wrapped in his coat. Sophy, shyest of women, turned crimson. Julian, on one knee beside her in his shirt and trousers, quietly wrung the water out of her sash and gave it back to her.

"I hope I haven't torn it," he said, smiling and matter of fact. "I was in a hurry, and I don't know much about ribbons."

"Oh! thank you," murmured Sophy, fitting it to her waist. Julian left her and went to help Denis secure the boats. When they returned, Sophy was on her feet again and had recovered everything except her hair-pins and her vanity. Her hair swung to her waist in a thick wet plait, her skirt clung round her legs, and her

sash was reduced to a string, but her own composure was unalterable. "I'm very sorry to have been such a nuisance," she said, looking from one to the other with her beautiful brown eyes. "I suppose now you'll think I can't swim either! I certainly can't punt—oh, there's my brother. Hi, Martin!"

Martin had whipped the stream till he was tired of whipping it: the trout were sulky, the sun was as bright and hot on the water as if it had been midsummer, and after watching for the better part of an hour without seeing a single fish rise he had left his tackle on the bank and followed his sister. His face when he came on the damp group by the elder tree was more eloquent than polite.

"Sophy! what on earth is the matter? Have you capsized the punt?"

Sophy had at times a baldness of manner which was destined later to remind her father of one whom he would have preferred to forget. "I fell into the water and was drowned, and these gentlemen jumped in after me and pulled me out."

"It was our fault," said Julian. "We were all across the stream." Denis, ever truthful, uttered a small involuntary sound of dissent. "Luckily my friend had his wits about him. He has all the honours, Miss Laleham: you forbade us to go in after you and I obeyed you blindly."

"At all events I am to gather that you have saved this worthless person's life," said Martin, drawing Sophy's hand through his arm. "We're very grateful to you. Will you tell me your names? I see you know ours."

"My friend is Denis Hay: as for me, am I so altered as

to be obliged to introduce myself?—Julian Charnwood."

"It *is* you!" Martin exclaimed.

His tone was so confused and constrained that Julian drew back as if half inclnied to be offended, but after a moment Martin's manner changed and he held out his hand with a singularly sweet smile. "Julian, you home again! You reminded me of your family directly I saw you, but it's so long since we wrote that I had no idea you were expected over here. Welcome back to England! You're at Greys?—I suppose Olive is not with you?"

"My sister? No, she is in town."

"Why, of course," Sophy exclaimed, "it's Olive you're like!"

She glanced at Martin, and Martin received a silent answer to a silent question. "Will you both come and dine to-night?" he asked. "My mother will never forgive me if I don't secure her a chance of expressing her gratitude."

Julian, in the act of slipping on his coat, remained half in and half out of it. The last ten minutes had been so full of incidents that he had taken them at their face value without giving a thought to the extraordinary situation which had sprung out of them, but now his "We shall be delighted" died on his lips. "I'm—I'm afraid we have an engagement," he stammered, "haven't we, Denis?" Pale under his bronze, and grave, Denis was watching his brother and sister with eyes which expressed nothing but affection, tender, wistful, and unconcealed.

"Thank you: I should like to come."

"Certainly *you* are to come," said Sophy: "however many engagements Mr Charnwood has."

She gave her hand to Denis and not to Julian, who was annoyed, and annoyed at his own annoyance: what did she mean, this Sophy Laleham, whom he remembered twelve years ago as a vague slip of a girl always pulling up her stockings? "Let's go home, Martin," Sophy continued: "and you too, Mr Hay, or you'll catch cold standing about in your wet clothes." Now Julian, having helped to pull Sophy out of the water, was quite as wet as Denis. "Mind you row, and not Mr Charnwood: there's nothing like exercise for warding off a chill."

The brother and sister went off—Martin again extended at full length, Sophy wielding her pole with exactly the same erratic vigour as had recently brought her near a watery grave. "Come along," said Julian, "you had better obey orders, old man." Denis sat down languidly and unshipped his sculls. "You don't look up to much. Had you rather I rowed?"

"No, oh no: it was nothing, the water wasn't cold. It is only that it makes me feel so queer talking to them. I should like to do what people do in plays."

"Throw yourself into their arms and exclaim 'I am your long-lost brother'?"

"Practically," said Denis smiling. "I am so lonely, Julian. That sounds ungrateful when you're so good to me, but you can't—no one can but Lord Laleham and Martin—make a place for me among other people. At present I haven't even a name I can call my own."

"At all events you're already on easy terms with your sister. You weren't effusive, but 'deeds not words' would seem to be the lady's motto."

"Isn't she awfully silly?" Denis said, rather unexpectedly but with extreme tenderness. "Did you ever see

anything so ridiculous as the way she fell in? But she's plucky all the same, there aren't many girls that would have kept as cool as she did. I like Martin too, he's so quiet, so awfully well bred: I do admire them both, don't you?"

"H'm: I'm not so sure. Miss Sophy had a slap at me which I've not forgiven her, and I rather fancy I owe Martin a bit of an old grudge that hasn't yet come up for payment."

"What for?"

"Nothing," said Julian curtly. "One of the little outstanding bills that people have run up with the family while I've been away. Confound his impertinence, who gave him leave to call her Olive? . . . Get on, Denis: it's not July, though it looks like it. By the by—are you really going to dine at the Chase to-night?"

"We said we would, didn't we?" said Denis, looking at him in surprise. "I was so glad I made Mr Burnaby —well, Burnaby, then—do my evening clothes before he went on to the tweeds, because I can go about in this suit although it is shabby, but I couldn't have dined at Laleham Chase without evening dress."

"It defeats me to see how you can dine there at all. Shan't you mind meeting Lord Laleham?" Denis shook his head. "Oh, Gods!" Julian appealed to the blue April sky, "is that temerity or imbecility?—Denis, I don't want to worry you, but as you've let me in for a most uncomfortable evening you might at least give me a map of the country! You saw your father last night, but I haven't heard a syllable of what happened between you: all I know is that he hasn't acknowledged you: and in the middle of this cinema situation you accept the un-

conscious Martin's invitation to dinner! If you don't feel awkward, I shall. I wish you had let me keep out of it."

"So do I, if it makes you uncomfortable. But I am a stupid fellow, I never see things beforehand," said Denis with his disarming humility. "Truly I can't explain now: I will some day."

"Denis."

"M'm?"

"You'll never tell me anything at all."

". . . Think not?" said Denis the unsatisfactory.

CHAPTER VIII

It is not every day that one has a narrow escape of being drowned. But Sophy's tale at lunch, dramatic though it was, met with an unsympathetic reception. Lady Laleham was chiefly struck by Sophy's foolishness; her husband listened with interest till Denis's identity was revealed, then sank back in his chair crumbling his bread, and said no more—nor ate much more either.

Even in middle age Lord Laleham was afraid to let his mind dwell on Viola's flight or Viola's end. However, he had outlived his trouble and lived it down; he was married to a wife who made him almost perfectly happy; he was tenderly fond of his daughter and tenderly proud of his son; and this was the time, the golden St Luke's summer of his later life, when the dead hand of Edward Delahay elected to bring Denis on the scene! Lord Laleham swore and would go on swearing that Denis was no son of his. No proof would open eyes so wilfully blind. But the deeper truth was that he did not care whether Denis was his son or no. Whatever the fleshly tie might be, the spiritual tie bound Denis, not to the honest and gentle Englishman, but to his wild, disreputable scamp of a foster-father. Lord Laleham could not bring himself to recall his forgotten paternity. He had Martin, and Martin was son enough for him. Denis was "that fellow's" breed. The primary relation (if it existed) was overlaid. No instinct urged him to take this innocent prodigal to his bosom. An ex-shipping

clerk in readymade tweeds was no true scion of Laleham stock.

Lord Laleham did think, when he heard Sophy's story, that Fate was dealing hardly with him. This was a scurvy trick! His animosity was not softened by gratitude: it is a truism that we rarely love our enemies the better for their having done us a good turn. When the invitation and its acceptance followed it seemed more than he could bear! Miserable rascal! the young bartender had fairly got his foot in at Laleham now.

"But are they presentable?" Lady Laleham asked doubtfully. Sophy was so extremely democratic! "Is this Mr Hay related to the Charnwoods? I really do not like those young men very much; I can't think how it is that the girls are even as nice as they are, with such brothers."

"The girls" were Olive and Delphine, whom Laleham Chase had known since pinafore years in the course of their various visits to Greys. Lady Laleham would have escaped Julian's satire, for she had accepted Mr Jack Charnwood, pickles and all, as well as his lame son, but she drew a line of her own founded on distinctions not of etiquette but of taste. "Oh, you won't mind these two," said Sophy: "will she, Martin? My one's clothes look as though they had come out of a jumble sale, but he has a very nice smile: and Julian Charnwood is a most personable young man—not a bit like Uncle Jack."

"They are well-bred men," said Martin with his usual concise simplicity.

"Oh, my dear Martin!" said Lord Laleham.

"Don't you think so, sir?"

"I haven't seen young Charnwood since he was a boy."

"But the other fellow—Sophy's friend? He has a very shy, stiff manner, I admit, but all the same I liked the look of him. Literally, I like his way of looking one straight in the eyes."

"Oh, I think he's a horrid young bounder," exclaimed Lord Laleham with less than his usual elegance. "I wish you had not asked them without consulting me, Sophy." It was Martin, not Sophy, who had given the invitation, but somehow or other Sophy was not infrequently used as Martin's whipping boy, as if Lord Laleham were a little in awe of his heir. "You are too impetuous, my dear."

He rose, threw down his napkin, and left the room. Even Martin was moved to mild surprise by this abrupt withdrawal, and the three left behind gazed at one another with startled faces. "He is not well: I'm sure papa isn't well," said Lady Laleham. "Or else he is worried—you don't know of any trouble, Martin?"

"No: but I might not, if there were one."

"He has taken a very violent dislike to that unfortunate young man," said Sophy. "Did you hear what he called me? Impetuous, of all things on earth! Was ever a poor young girl so rated? It is most unlike father to be so harsh."

It is a great mistake to acquire the reputation of possessing an equable temper.

"We can't put them off," remarked Martin. "Not without pointed incivility. And after all we do owe the fellow a certain amount of gratitude: Sophy is a doubtful blessing it is true—still for form's sake we ought at least to *appear* grateful."

"Perhaps he'll have come round by to-night," said Sophy. Lady Laleham was looking anxious and did not

reply. "In any case we can't put off my heroic rescuer. An h. r. is entitled to his dinner. Besides, we mustn't let father contract foolish fancies. He is becoming both prejudiced and vituperative and I shall expect him to swear at me next. Mother, isn't it a pity Olive isn't staying at Greys? Then we could have asked her up with her brother. It would have been so nice for Martin."

"Why, yes," said Lady Laleham, rousing herself from a brown study. "I don't think there was any real harm in Olive, though she gave one the impression of being very fast. But in a family of that class the women are often better than the men."

"Well, Hay does not belong to that family," said Martin. "No one could call him fast."

"No. Mamma, I'll take the h. r. in to dinner. He'll be frightened of you, and he isn't your sort. You'll get on like a house afire with Mr Charnwood, and I shouldn't: I don't like him at all: he thinks too much of himself—he always was a conceited boy."

"We shall be very badly balanced," said Lady Laleham: "all men and no women. You and Mr Hay, Julian Charnwood and I—dear me, there's no lady for your father!"

"Father will be away," said Martin.

"Away!"

"Unavoidably detained. I'm only guessing."

"Don't guess," said Sophy: "the facts of you are bad enough without any dreadful guessing. What a pity we can't wire to Olive to come down for the evening! Then Martin would be happy."

"Dear me, yes! I'd forgotten she was an old flame of Martin's," said Lady Laleham, smiling. Martin

leaned back in his chair and looked attentively at the walnut he was peeling. Men are islands, and we may all believe, if we please, that the other members of our household are planning suicide or elopement or murder under the domestic mask: this ambiguity lends a zest to life, but leads to some involuntary giving of pain. Martin's devotion to Olive Charnwood had been a standing joke in his family for the last five years, but there are none so blind as near relations, and apparently no idea of his being in earnest had ever crossed their minds. Lady Laleham, shrewd woman of the world and tender mother, Sophy, whose observant eyes were commonly focussed on her brother, read nothing under the surface of Martin's tranquil manner; nor did Martin desire to be penetrated. He could bear with his hopeless love so long as no one knew anything about it, but sympathy—the sympathy of the eyes and heart that they would have given him, the aching pity that never expresses itself but by a timely silence—would have been intolerable. "Not that I could ever understand what you professed to see in her," pursued Lady Laleham cheerfully. "She's handsome in her way, and I believe she has done her best for those boys, but I could never look at her without reflecting that the man who marries her will have to marry the organ-grinder into the bargain."

"Poor Olive!" said Martin, calmly eating his walnut. "She isn't responsible for Sladen's manners, or his morals either—if they are so bad: you have your little prejudices, you know."

"My dear, no woman of fifty-six is worth her salt who hasn't. Prejudice is judgment before proof, and I should have made poor use of my time if I had to wait

for evidence before taking the length of Sladen Charnwood's foot. Mark my words, that boy will come to a bad end."

"I can't stand him at any price," said Martin, "but there's no harm in him."

"There's no good in him either," retorted Lady Laleham, "and Jack Charnwood himself told me that he had been obliged to forbid cards when Sladen was in the house. 'Plays too high for me, my lady,' that was the way he put it: but I've heard other rumours. No, the best one can wish for those girls is to marry and get out of their disreputable surroundings, and I only wonder Olive hasn't done it long ago—she's one of those striking-looking, free and easy girls that men of a certain type go mad about." Martin protested: not to have done so would have exposed him to suspicion. "Oh, of course every woman smokes nowadays. But they don't all like doing it: and Olive does. She pulls out her cigarette-case as naturally as a man, in fact I always expect her to offer one to me. I dare say she does to you."

"Certainly," said Martin with a faint smile, "and I accept with pleasure."

"Goose!" said his mother. "But young men are all geese, they like that hail-fellow-well-met manner—though to do her justice Olive is not a flirt: she never seems to know whether she's talking to a man or a woman. Mind you, I respect her, and I should be glad to see her comfortably settled, though I don't want her for a daughter-in-law. Perhaps this Mr Hay will step into the breach: he must be fairly intimate with the family, if Jack Charnwood has him to stay."

"Happy idea!" said Martin. "A fellow with Hay's

gift of silence would be the very man for a bold-faced jig like Olive."

"She can't have him. I want him," said Sophy. "I feel it in my bones: at least I can't see what it can be that I feel in my bones if it isn't that. It came over me this morning while we were saying goodbye. He was holding my hand and looking down at me with those nice eyes of his, when suddenly the idea came into my mind that he was going to kiss me. And the odd thing is that I wasn't a bit offended: it seemed so natural, such an everyday sort of feeling that I was quite surprised when he didn't!" Martin raised his eyebrows. "Now, don't be a prig, Martin: you know quite well I don't mean *in that way.*"

"Mr Middleton's way?"

"Bother!" said Sophy "—all right, I shan't tell you anything ever again."

"Sophy, you are the youngest girl of your years I ever met," said Martin, "and the most transparent." He had watched his sister while her candid speech flowed from her heart to her lips, and like the French cynic he asked himself, *à quoi rêvent les jeunes filles?* Sophy was sitting with her elbows on the table and her chin on her hands, and there was no veil over her soft brown eyes, he might look into her very soul if he liked and find nothing there but healthy innocence. And she laughed across at him, a little teasing laugh. . . .

"No, not Mr Middleton's way: nor Olive Charnwood's way either. Oh Martin, did you ever——?"

"Sophy!" said Lady Laleham.

"I'm only getting even with Martin," Sophy explained. But the reproof had been automatic, Lady

Laleham was not lending more than half an ear to her daughter's chatter: and after a glance at her mother's grave, abstracted face Sophy slipped from her chair and came and leaned over her brother's shoulder, putting her lips to his ear.

"Martin, *who* is the mysterious Denis Hay?"

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps we shall learn to-night."

CHAPTER IX

Laleham Chase had not often held such an ill-assorted gathering as met under its roof that night.

The west room, where they dined, was long and low. Tudor windows overlooked the sunset, their upper lights blazoned with Laleham and allied armorial bearings, and fronting them on a panelled wall portraits of dead-and-gone Lalehams glimmered from their tarnished frames. The family had always had a bent for art: appreciators, not creators, they had gathered in the early work of many a man who won fame when his patron was dead and buried. In grouping they had exercised a fine but indifferent discrimination. No attempt had been made to bring their surroundings within the compass of a period or a style. An afternoon of Claude, brimmed with sunshine, hung beside the brown and silver of a Corot twilight. No need to study atmosphere: the noble old room had a temperament of its own, and imposed it alike on Moorish azulejos and Sèvres pot pourri bowls, on the dim roses of a French carpet, and the silver-dragoned, night-blue curtains from Pekin.

For daily meals Lady Laleham used an oval table in the centre window, through which, on this mild April evening, her guests could look out over wide flower-gardens, the stream's lighted mirror, and a flare of crimson behind woody western hills. Clouds had gathered, so that it was still warm; the day-long sunshine lingered in a balmy twilight. The air was full of the honied sweetness of spring, that indefinable night scent of buds

unfolding, of primrose and violet and hyacinth breaking into flower: full also of spring's melancholy, the sense of tears in mortal things which falls now and again on every imaginative man. Such an hour had come to Martin Laleham, and he was bearing it with what philosophy he might.

It was not a merry party. Ordinarily Lord Laleham would have led the informal talk, but to-night he found little to say: he was profoundly unhappy, and it cost him all his strength to seem only stiff and cold. His private opinion was that Denis, by forcing an entrance into Laleham, had broken all the rules of polite warfare and deserved no quarter. Lady Laleham was little less ill at ease, though she did her best to be kind. She was vexed with her Claude, whose indulgence of temper at his own table showed what in any other man she would have condemned as want of breeding. Nor did she receive much support from Martin, no dinner-table talker at the best of times, and preoccupied to-night with sad thoughts of his own as well as with watching his father. He had seen that Lord Laleham quietly avoided shaking hands with Denis, and that Denis as quietly facilitated this avoidance. Even Julian was oppressed: and Denis—who could read the mind of Denis? At all events there was always a certain amount of state about a Laleham dinner, and Denis was not quite happy among fish-knives and footmen.

Sophy alone was care-free: Sophy, who loved a touch of drama, and had dressed herself (to her mother's horror) in tune with a dramatic occasion. Diamonds glittered in her hair, a diamond collar ringed her small

throat, sparks of diamond winked out of the opalescent veils that flowed and drifted over her sloping shoulders and narrow satin gown. Was she pretty? No, not pretty, Julian decided, but radiant and fanciful, a delicate Protean shape, exciting in the male mind a desire to seize her and find out if there was a real woman inside her iris clouds: and more and more, in the informality of the scene and constraint of the other actors, he found himself paying the expenses of the conversation for Sophy's benefit. Sophy had begun as in duty bound by trying to make Denis talk of his South American life, but Denis was not to be drawn beyond smiling monosyllables, and insensibly the fluent Julian was lured, as usual, into answering for his friend.

"I wish I were a man," said Sophy sighing. "It's distracting to think of all the thrilling things that must happen every day in an outlandish place like that. It would be like living in a novel."

"I always carry a revolver in my hip pocket," said Julian. "A Smith and Wesson. It looks a mere toy."

"Pooh!" Sophy wrinkled up her nose. "What Mr Le Queux's people carry is a Browning automatic. But I dare say you do really carry one all the same—for duels—do Peruvians fight duels?"

"Mine managers don't," said Julian apologetically. "Don't expect too much, Miss Laleham. Arequipa is a civilised town with shops and cinemas and a bullring and some shocking bad hotels. Even our revolution wasn't at all picturesque. Fighting never is when you see it close at hand." In the spring of 1914 this dateless truism might pass for original.

"Did you go through a revolution?"

"It would be difficult to live ten years in Peru without going through a revolution. Yes, we saw one, didn't we, Denis? and a rotten nuisance it was—wrecked my trade for a twelvemonth."

"I remember," said Martin. "It was in the English papers at the time. The rebels got the worst of it, didn't they?"

"Was anyone killed?" asked Sophy.

"Quite a few," said Julian gravely. "They used real guns." Then to Martin, "Thank heaven, yes! They scraped together a few hundred ruffians, mixed Spaniards and half castes, and fell on the President in the streets of Lima—a very able man, by the by, and honest into the bargain, which is more than can be said for most of our political notables: I never saw such a place for graft. He was left for dead and the rebels began to loot the town. I was in Lima at the time buying a fresh outfit, so I saw all the fun. I recollect that I was in the act of getting measured for a pair of riding boots when firing broke out and the entire establishment went adrift. After helping them to put their shutters up, I went for a stroll, but it was all over in a few hours. The only casualty I saw was a man who climbed up a lamp post to get a better view, broke the glass, and cut his hand. As soon as the Constitutional troops recovered from their surprise, it dawned on them that they were being held by a mere handful of men, and there was a swift rally, and the insurgents were beaten off. Their general got away over the border into Bolivia, some of his followers surrendered, some were shot; we dragged the President out, not much hurt, from under a heap of killed and wounded,

the mess in the streets was cleared up, and I went back to see after my boots."

"All in the day's work!" said Lady Laleham smiling.

"Weren't you hurt?" asked Sophy.

"No, I regret to say I wasn't. Not even a mere scratch."

"Then why was your trade wrecked?" Sophy persisted. "No, mamma, I am not curious: I am drawing my guest out on his own subject, which is what all manuals of polite conversation tell one to do. Credit shaken—currency debased—what was it?"

"I was on the shelf for some time after."

Sophy raised her eyebrows. "A nervous breakdown?"

"No, señorita. Six months in jail."

In the mild sensation that followed, Julian drank off a glass of wine and avoided Denis's eye. That incident was an unwelcome memory, one of the skeletons that lurk behind a door in every man's mind; he had not spoken of it to any of his own people except Olive; and it seemed strange even to himself that he should have given it away to Sophy Laleham across a dinner table.

"But, if I may take a leaf out of my young sister's book," said Martin, "why were you put in prison if you were a Constitutional?"

"Oh, they had a spy-hunt," said Julian lightly. "An ex-clerk of mine whom I had sacked for dishonesty incriminated me and I was arrested on suspicion. Once in a Spanish jail you don't get out in a hurry."

"After all it was part of the patchwork," said Sophy: "a piece of experience: if you want adventures, they can't be all fun."

"But I never did want adventures," Julian pointed out. "I wanted trade."

"I should fear," said Lady Laleham, "this was a very trying one."

Julian made a little foreign deprecating movement with his hands. "Oh! more or less. One wasn't sure how it would end: and one's quarters were not so luxurious as Princetown."

"It was an awful, ghastly hole," said Denis, unexpectedly striking in. "I got in to see him several times and it made me sick. There were fifty men all herded together in one horrid room, and they were hardly given any water for washing, and it was as hot as—it was very hot, and they were dying like flies of enteric and malaria. Eight or nine of them were hanged, and nearly as many more didn't live to stand their trial."

"And Mr Charnwood went through that?" said Sophy, leaning her chin upon her interlaced hands and examining Julian as if she were trying to reconstruct out of his handsome careless conventionality the fevered scarecrow of a South American jail. "No, that was not amusing. Still, I'd rather take the rough with the smooth than live as the men do that one meets in town, never out of reach of a Turkish bath and never in any worse danger than a Piccadilly crossing. People ought to risk their lives now and then, just for nothing at all, just for luck. Most of the men we know live on cushions. Dirt and death would do them a lot of good." Her face had grown dreamy; strange to say, she and she alone had not shaken off the impression produced by George Danvers' letter from Berlin. "Otherwise, one's afraid that when their chance comes they won't take it."

Julian, daintily peeling himself a tangerine, caught his hostess's eye and smiled.

"My daughter is a sentimentalist," said Lady Laleham.

"An idealist," amended Julian. Sophy registered a small protest, but it was disregarded. "As a mere man of business I'd rather not be shot, and even if I were in training for a hero I'd rather not be shot in a pantomime. I was very badly scared in my toy prison, but I was always more angry than frightened."

"How did you get out?" asked Martin.

"By the key that unlocks all doors in Peru—bribery and corruption. A friend who was hand in glove with the military authorities applied in the proper quarter for an early trial. They were oiled, and agreed. He then oiled my ex-clerk, who decamped, and the case against me broke down. I was released without a stain on my character and full of gratitude to my preserver. It was Mr Hay, this fellow's father—at least—I mean——"

This was strikingly unfortunate even for Julian, and he did not mend matters by turning very red and coming to a dead stop. For an appreciable interval of time there was an awestruck hush all round the table. Martin darted a glance at Lord Laleham, while Lady Laleham lowered her eyes and sat very still. Her husband turned slowly crimson: Denis, white.

"Very difficult to follow, your Latin-American politics," said Martin. "Bryce's book is admirable, but it does not shed much light on the principles of democratic organisation." He paused. No one was ready to answer him. "But in all modern social movements the casual observer is inevitably baffled, because our poli-

ticians are so shy of letting cats out of bags that unless you're in the swim it's impossible to tell which way the wind is blowing."

These rolling periods sounded well, and no one except Sophy, who came perilously near to a fit of schoolgirl giggles, had leisure to realise that they were unadulterated nonsense. The awkward moment was tided over. Nevertheless, every one knew that there had been an awkward moment—a circumstance which would imperil the health of the most robust conversation; this, having been sickly from the outset, soon threatened to die altogether, and Lady Laleham, unable to bear it any longer, rose. Immediately Martin, terrified at the prospect of being left alone between his father and his guests, rose too, suggesting coffee in the garden. Everyone felt relief, and most of all Lord Laleham, who was able to excuse himself on the score of rising dampness. Lady Laleham sent for a coat and the party drifted out and scattered themselves along the terrace. Lady Laleham kept Denis by her, Martin stayed with his mother: Sophy, disclaiming any other wrap than a starcoloured Japanese scarf, wandered down the steps and over the springing verdure of the lawn. She did not exactly signal to Julian to go with her, but he found himself walking at her side with no doubt of his welcome. Sophy at first seemed to be disinclined for talk: she strolled along with clasped hands, her cloudy raiment brushing the dewy buds, her fragile slippers printing a black Cinderella pattern in the grey April dew.

"This grass is wet," said Julian: "come on the path."

Sophy was deaf to the voice of wisdom. "Don't you like crocuses growing on a lawn?" she asked irrelevantly.

"The great Kemp, our head gardener, says they spoil the turf, but I love them. He and I have a battle royal over them every year. I love these mauve ones. Oh I do think," she paused and her expressive eyes ranged over the dim verdure of the garden, its infinite intricacy of beaded turf and budded spray all hushed under the infinite monotone of twilight, "these evenings that you get late in March or early in April, these first warm evenings when you can smell the flowers through their buds, are the loveliest in all the year. Do you mind telling me why you got so red just now?"

One end of her scarf had slipped from her bare shoulder, and Julian, whose practical view of life extended even to his dealings with young women, replied by replacing it. Then he caught the other fluttering end and drew it firmly round her throat.

"You'll catch cold," he explained, unconscious of trespass. "It isn't really June though it feels so warm. You ought to have more on."

Sophy slowly unwound the scarf and pulled it off. "I shall put on," she said, "exactly what I like. I never catch cold. If I did it would not be in the least your concern."

"No more it would," said Julian. "Not if you caught fifty colds, and I jolly well hope you will."

"Mr Charnwood! *really!*"

"Well, why do you make a fuss about nothing?"

It was the first time in her adult life that Sophy had been given as good as she gave. She stood before Julian for a moment open-mouthed in her surprise, then with a little crow of laughter put the scarf on again and wound it round and round her throat till she was perfectly

swathed in its folds. For Sophy had never the motives, though occasionally the manners, of a spoilt child. "Oh, you haven't altered a bit!" she cried. "You are, you really are the most natural man I ever met! You were so stiff and polite this morning I thought you had grown up, but you haven't, you aren't any older than when we used to play cricket together. Oh Julian—I shall call you Julian, I always did, and besides 'Mr. Charnwood' means your uncle Jack—Julian, have you really been away ten years? I haven't had anyone so rude to me since last time I pulled your hair."

"Apparently I've been away so long that I've forgotten how to behave." Julian's manner was still stiff though mollified. "I certainly had no intention of being rude in putting your scarf on for you."

"Of course not! It wanted doing so you did it—just as you might have nailed up a loose end of creeper, or picked a slug off a bud."

"A white rose bud . . ."

"Oh!"

It was some years since Julian had made a woman blush, and the effect of his compliment surprised him. Indeed he was surprised by the compliment: he had not meant to pay Sophy any compliments. Your manager of a thriving copper mine has a better use for his eyes than to observe the likeness between a white rose petal and the texture of a woman's skin.

"The fact is I am a plain business man and don't understand women. To me spring evenings and Dago revolutions don't represent anything except bad debts or a cold in the head. I'm fearfully sorry to be prosaic, but dare one suggest that you women go to the other

extreme? You spin subtleties out of things as matter-of-fact as two-and-two-make-four, which is disconcerting to the average man. Must we learn to play quarter-tones? I'm not sure it wouldn't be better if you tackled a plain scale."

"Oh, I can play all sorts of scales," said Sophy carelessly. "C major to all eternity if you like. You wouldn't like it, though." She surveyed him, her chin tilted a little impudently. "Quarter-tones are much more amusing."

"Not at my age. They may amuse your little friends in town—the cushioned class you were describing just now, that have never done a hand's turn of work nor earned a sovereign in their lives—but they're thrown away on me. I remember you, Sophy, when you were a little girl: you were a jolly naughty little girl. You haven't altered much either." He stood looking down on her bent head from his superiority of height with a superiority of mental attitude equally easy. It would do her good to be set down. No doubt a dandy of Martin's set (Julian had a grudge against Martin) would have risen to Sophy's gilded fly, but plain business men have no time to waste. It was moonshine, and worse: part of the web of sex-consciousness (Julian used this word in his own mind) that the smart idle women of the fashionable world are fond of spinning over the naked facts of life. Meanwhile Sophy remained immovable, her head still bent, her fingers interlaced: he could not see her face, but gradually the quality of her silence penetrated Julian, who with all his energy was not insensitive. This daughter of the smart and idle rich was silent not from pique but because her feelings had been

hurt—wounded unexpectedly to the quick. Then Julian's superiority forsook him at a breath.

"Oh, I say, what's wrong?" he exclaimed. "Look here, I'm awfully sorry—do forgive me, Sophy, I never meant to hurt you!"

She raised her head and gave it a little shake, and Julian saw with speechless contrition that a bright drop flew from her eyelashes. "I know you didn't. What are we making such a fuss about? How silly of both of us! I'm sorry too, it was as much my fault as yours."

"But why did you cry?"

"I did not cry."

"You're crying now!"

"Julian, your abilities are thrown away on a copper mine—you ought to be in the Diplomatic!"

"Oh, very well," said Julian, resigned. "Only I can't see why you shouldn't say 'I shan't tell you' instead of saying 'I didn't' when we both know you did."

"Because I'm a woman. No, because I'm a human being. If you cried you would swear you hadn't, wouldn't you?"

"Can't say," Julian laughed, giving a little twirl to his black moustache. "My imagination isn't equal to the demands you put on it. But I thought women could cry as much as they liked?"

"Oh, you've been away," said Sophy scornfully. "That was under Victoria. Nowadays a woman mayn't show any more feeling than a man."

"That must be inconvenient," said Julian smiling, "when she has so much more to show."

"Proper women haven't. My mother, for one. Oh, she feels! deeply, deeply, but it's not natural to her to

give way. Some years ago Martin had a fall hunting, and she met the men bringing him in on a gate. His horse had rolled on him, and the men thought he was dead and said so, but Mamma never made any fuss: she felt his wrist and found that he was alive, and sent for a doctor and a nurse, and broke the news to Father and me, and had the South Parlour cleared and Martin in bed in it before Dr Somers arrived. She was as cool as a professional: and yet Martin is the apple of her eye. She is a stoic." Sophy paused a moment. "I'm not."

"No?"

"I cry over weddings and funerals, and plays, and things in the paper, and things people say to me. They hurt. *You* hurt. It wasn't so much what you said, it was the knowing that you meant, wanted, to hurt me. I hate that. I never want to hurt people. Why should you want to hurt me?"

Julian was holding his breath to hear more. In Arequipa he had never met anyone like Sophy, whose baffling naturalness made him despair of understanding her. The little burst of unreserve was so strange! It was as if a butterfly had alighted on his hand. Wandering on, they were by now out of sight of the house, treading an alley paved with turf and thyme between high, winding walls of yew: and in the dim remains of twilight and against these black fortifications Sophy with her glimmering raiment and pearly skin flitted along like a moth. Then Julian had a sudden impulse to take her in his arms and comfort her after a fashion less formal than modern etiquette allows.

The wish was no sooner framed than he took alarm: good heavens, surely he was not going to fall in love?

Hastily he recalled earlier experiences . . . few, for he had been too young for love in England and too preoccupied in Peru: but there was no forgetting Josephine Stanfield, tall handsome Jo with her bright eyes and crest of red hair, who had bewitched him for half a winter in his lonely early days in Arequipa when it was any port in a storm: queer wild memories of stolen afternoons, Jo riding ahead of him and daring him to catch her on the steep mountain trail: Jo in his arms caught at last and tossing her fiery plume out of her eyes and putting up her bold lips and dissolving in sudden languor in a kiss that pierced his manhood . . . good heavens, no—there was no comparison. Love is fiercer, brighter, and less patient than the complexity of feelings, all gentle, which he found rising in his breast for Sophy Laleham. No, he was not in love: it was but the springing up of a warm liking, such another friendship as he had always felt for Denis, but softened to something more protective and affectionate in proportion as the lady was more sensitive than the man. After all, its seed had been sown in nursery days—no wonder it sprang up so quickly! "Sophy," said Julian gently, "I'm very sorry I was rude to you. Say you forgive me?"

"Oh yes," Sophy murmured, "I forgive you. . . . Go on about the revolution."

Meanwhile the elder representative of the Idle Rich was also prosecuting an acquaintance with his guest. Almost immediately after coffee was served Martin touched Denis on the arm: "You were saying you would like to look at some of my books."

"I should very much."

The son of the house got up with a word of apology to his mother, and slowly and with strange sensations—because they were alone together for the first time—Denis followed him by flowered terrace and shining gallery into the west wing. In deference to the spirit of an age which held "that a man should not belong to the same club as his father, or inhabit the same capital as his mother," Lord Laleham had insisted on giving up the west wing to his son's exclusive use, when Martin came to live at home. Everyone found the arrangement a little inconvenient, particularly Martin, who could have been comfortable in the attic of a six-roomed villa, and complained bitterly in private because he said he had a mile to walk to his bath: but Lord Laleham was so happy to have proved that he was nothing if not modern, that no one had the heart to undeceive him. In the end Martin came to like his removed and airy quarters.

The room into which he led Denis was large and low, and the dying fires of sunset failed to dispel its shadows, till Martin lit the lamps, which threw back the blue and grey and dusky orange colour of the west into a remote infinity. Then Denis looked round him with deep interest: and so this was his brother's room! Strangely unlike the spray-haunted stone garret in which his own boyhood had sought privacy. . . . Very spacious, dark, and cosy: walls lined and tables strewn with books: over the hearth a French landscape of woodland and lilied water, leaf and stream trembling between beryl and amber as the sun glowed golden through their shadows: and a great stone-framed oriel, which gave a noble view over a wide expanse of blue countryside and a dimly-burning sky still full of light behind darkened hills. . . .

"What a jolly room!" said Denis softly.

"Nice outlook, isn't it?" said Martin, uncertain of his cue. He suspected Denis of liking dogs better than literature. "These are my shop-window shelves. Do you care for first editions? They're a millionaire's hobby, worse luck: still I pick them up when I get a chance."

"You go in for poetry chiefly, don't you?" said Denis with a quiet laugh. "What's that pretty one—is it valuable? I wish I weren't so ignorant."

"An old book in a modern binding, but it's good all the same." Martin held the tall morocco volume aslant in its barbaric orange-colour till the lamplight struck fire out of its gilded grapes and lilies. "But why shouldn't you learn? Anyone can that cares, and you seem to care."

"I do, but one has to be born to it. I wasn't. At least, I suppose I was *born* to it—" he smiled—"but I wasn't bred to it and one can't cram it like a sum. It wants to sink in, like it has into you and Lord Laleham, and that Miss Charnwood."

"Miss Charnwood?"

Martin had expected that name to come up, but not so soon: and the stab was even sharper than he had foreseen, for Denis lingered over Olive's name with unconcealed affection: but under the fangs and claws of jealousy Martin's manner did not vary by one hair's breadth from its pleasant decorum.

"Julian's sister? But she doesn't admire *bibelots* of any sort, or the effeminate fellows who collect them. She calls it a waste of time."

"Oh, but she doesn't mean it! You can tell directly

that she knows all about Art: she wouldn't be so beautiful if she didn't—or not in the same way."

"The intellectual type of beauty? Oh ah!" Martin's eyes were amiably cynical. "She used to be a great friend of my sister's, but we haven't seen much of her this last year or two: the others have come to Greys now and then, but Olive has stayed in town. I have her photograph somewhere about: I wonder if she has altered much." After some pretence of searching in the wrong place he took it from a locked drawer: no photograph in point of fact, but a crayon drawing executed in a few swift strokes, a speaking likeness of Olive stretched out on a sofa, her head dim in the shadow of a black lace scarf, a strong light striking on a clasp under her breast and on the buckle of a slipper that had half fallen from her foot. Denis carried it to the light and studied it with mixed feelings.

"I don't like it," he said with decision.

"Why not? Most critics agree that Yarborough has a wonderful knack of seizing character."

But the words that would have defined his distaste were not in Denis's vocabulary. He simply shook his head over the sketch and gave it back to Martin, who restored it to its drawer.

"It's valuable," he said in explanation of his turning the key. "There are not many of Yarborough's signed sketches knocking about in the market, and they fetch a long price at a sale." He would as soon have sold his mother's jewels. "But I wonder why you don't care for it. Is she so much altered?"

"N-no. Oh no. It's like her, in a way."

"Not handsome enough?"

"Ye-es—in a way. Did he know her very well? the painter I mean."

"Selwyn Yarborough? He was rather thick with Sladen at that time: always in and out of the house. Yes, he must have known her pretty well. What of it?"

At mention of Sladen, Denis's antipathy crystallised. "I think it was rather cheek of him to draw her like that."

Martin's face lit up with his rare sweet smile. "Well, Hay, to tell you the truth, I thought so too. But her brothers admired it immensely."

"Oh, they would—not Julian, he wouldn't."

"No," Martin agreed, and then by common consent they let the subject drop. Denis had been taking down some of his brother's books at random, and now stood weighing a slender volume in his hand. "Hullo, what have you got there?" said Martin hastily. "That's only some modern rubbish not worth looking at."

Denis read out the title: "'*Poems*, by Maurice Linton.' Oh, but I've read these." He turned over the leaves. "They're good, aren't they? I know I don't know anything about Literature, but I liked them awfully, and my—my—the man I was staying with said if an ass like me liked them it showed they must be good. We had them out in Mollendo in a box from Mudie's."

Martin had recaptured his composure with an effort. "They mean well, but no modern verse is worth much to my mind. I dare say it was mainly the subjects that drew you. Come and look at my Cuzins."

But Denis still stood ruffling the Clarendon leaves. Martin's confusion had struck him, and he recalled the themes, the setting, the manner of certain lyrics that had

taken his fancy: *With the Staghounds, In the Mariebourne Valley, Grey Towers*, which Edward Delahay had said might have been written of Laleham Chase: *Out of the Service, Portrait of a Lady* . . . Intuition, the strange instinctive sympathy that had made the half-brothers soothing to each other from the first, led him to his next direct and simple question.

"Is it yours?" Martin made no answer. "I'm glad if it is. I liked it—what I could understand of it—awfully."

"What a fool I am to have given myself away! Yes, it's mine. Do you know you're the only living soul that's honoured with that piece of information? Even my publisher I never told."

"Not your father?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Martin horror stricken. "Nor S—— your sister?" Martin shook his head. "Nor Miss Charnwood?"

He made Martin start, for all his self-control. "Not she! why on earth should I confide in her?"

Denis tucked the book under his arm. "I'm going to borrow this," he said smiling and with a gentle finality of tone that dispensed with permission. "I liked it before but I shall understand it miles better now. You don't mind, do you, Martin? I won't tell anyone."

Martin did not reply for some moments. Quiet and unassuming in manner, he was not fond of running up rapid intimacies, and he was as well able to protect himself against familiarity as most men; if he hesitated it was not for want of a polished incivility but from an *embarras du choix*. But Denis was innocent of offence. One does not call one's brother by his surname, and he

had thought of Martin as "Martin" from the first and was not even aware that he had translated thought into word. He stood looking down at the younger man with eyes that expressed a more than ordinary fraternal kindness. He was so lonely, so destitute of ties that his heart yearned over his brother. Meeting that glance, all Martin's resentment melted away.

"Did you mean to call me 'Martin' just now?"

"Rather not! Did I? I beg your pardon, I am an ass. I hope you didn't mind?"

"No: but why the devil should you do it by accident?"

Denis hesitated, visibly at a loss.

"Hay, is there any secret between you and my father?"

"If there were, it would be him that ought to tell you, and not me, wouldn't it?"

Mild and ungrammatical and baffling! Martin shrugged his shoulders and turned away. He was not even irritated, though Denis exuded virtue and had a twinkle in his eye. But he was sure now that there really was a mystery and he swore to solve it—the mystery of a personality, and a sentiment, and a frame of mind.

CHAPTER X

"Au clair de la lun-e,
Mon ami Pierrot,
Prête-moi ta plum-e . . .

Delphine, my darling, it's a quarter to six. Nearly time for church."

"Church! Oh! What a bother!" Delphine's pretty face lengthened dolefully. Compulsory churchgoing under escort formed a Sunday treat which was not always to her taste. Had she known that it was merely an item in the scheme of her social salvation, planned in hopes that the vicar and his wife would ultimately come and call on her as the one white lamb in a black fold, she would have flatly refused to go. But it was the rule at No. 27: her escort might vary, for no other member of the family was brave enough to face two sermons running except Leigh, and Leigh, though naturally devout, felt bashful in a pew on account of his scarred and disreputable appearance: but by one or another Delphine was marched off twice on a Sunday, *ruat coelum*, and vaguely she inferred that it was one of the things that girls had to do till they grew up. There were however limits to the white lamb's meekness. "Oh, *need* I go tonight? Tommy said perhaps he was going to look in."

"You didn't go last Sunday."

"You didn't either then! You haven't been for six weeks—morning *or* evening. And I'm growing up now, I really am: I'm seventeen!"

"Never mind, it won't last very long, and you like going with Leigh. He's coming in early on purpose to take you, do you know that? and you must brush your hair and put on a fresh ribbon before you start. I got some for you at Evans's yesterday, so pretty! brown, just your colour: it's in my top-right-hand-little-drawer. Put some coal on first, I don't want the fire to be low when the boys come in."

"Brown!" cried Delphine, still more indignant, and dropping her curls into the scuttle in an effort to put on coals with one hand and pull up her stocking with the other. "Oh, Olive, you *might* have let me get it for myself! I had brown last time, I wanted something prettier this time. Tommy says with my coloured hair I ought to wear greeny-gold—one of those shot effects——"

"Tommy is an insinuating young man and you're a goose. Greeny-gold taffetas for a baby girl of seventeen! Do you want to look like a Glastonbury art student?"

"N-no; but I shouldn't—ever. I could have got an all-right one at Liberty's. I *do* think you might let me buy my own clothes now!"

"Oh, get it, get it!" said Olive. "Go and tie yourself up in Liberty ribbons all over if you like, my darling, and I'll use the brown for a waistbelt. It was stupid of me, but I saw it in a window and it was such a jolly shade that I couldn't help going in. I forgot you would naturally prefer to choose for yourself."

"You don't really mind, do you?" asked Delphine, smitten with remorse. But Olive, serenely setting the

room to rights, only laughed and shook her head, and Delphine sat back on her heels before the fire with a brow once more unclouded. "I'll go directly," she murmured. Delphine always kept her brothers waiting and could be guaranteed to reduce any room to a muddle in five minutes: these wicked ways were her revenge upon the family discipline, so lax for the others, so strict for her. For though the entire establishment, Sladen included, ran to do her errands and danced attendance on her whims, she was not allowed to sit up after ten, or to smoke a cigarette, or to go out alone with Mr Wyatt or any other young man of her acquaintance. Apparently the Charnwoods, having given up all hope of attaining respectability in person, had agreed to concentrate their energies on this one discontented little ewe lamb.

"When's Julian coming home, Olive?"

"Prête-moi ta plum-e
Pour écrire un mot . . .

When he's tired of Uncle Jack, I imagine. Why—do you miss him?"

"Rather. I like Julian: most people look as if they had been taken out of the cloth before they were properly boiled, but Julian is crisp and brown all over. With his darling little silky black moustache and his flashing eyes, he's my ideal of a Spanish hidalgo. And I like Denis too: he's not handsome, like Julian, but he has a most aristocratic nose. I've been wondering if he'd lend it me."

"Ma chandelle est mort-e,
Je n'ai plus de feu,
Ouvre-moi ta port-e,
Pour l'amour de Dieu . . .

Lend you his nose?"

"Yes, for the cigar-man I'm doing for Anson and Co. It's the sort of nose that smokes expensive cigars."

"I should have said it was the sort of nose that smokes a clay pipe, but I bow to your superior penetration. I really must clear up these newspapers. Have you done with *Punch?*"

"Yes— Oh no: leave it, please, I didn't finish Francesca. Well, I hope Denis will be pleasant about it, but I'd better ask him. People are so faddy," mused the artist, pillowing her round chin on her round palm: "I *never* have seen Tommy in such a wax as he was when I put him in as the aviator in that We-Cater-For-The-Services group I did for Grant and Maybury's High Class West End Tailoring. And yet I expected him to be flattered: but he wasn't—not a bit, though no one but me would have put one in at all."

"What a shame!" said Olive sympathetically. "Don't say 'wax,' it's vulgar."

"I heard you say 'The devil' this morning."

"I did not!"

"Olive, you did! when you were in the middle of Julian's wire."

Olive, whose vocabulary was the worse for many years of masculine society, looked guilty. "Then it was very wrong of me; but that's no reason why you should do it too. I want you to be nicer than I am."

"But you are nice," said the Jesuit by the fireside, "fearfully nice. We all adore you. I *wish* I had half a crown to buy that ribbon?"

"Catch!" A small gold coin span through the air. "And get yourself a belt to go with it, my darling, I love to see you looking nice. But when will you begin to grow up, Del?"

Delphine undulated to her feet, stretching her plump arms above her head and yawning with the generosity of a kitten. "If by growing up you mean feeling as though I had all the cares of the world on my shoulders, I hope I never shall. You are such an old fusspot! There's nothing so vulgar as to be always wondering whether you're being vulgar or not."

"Go and brush your hair, Baby."

"You're a Stoic—Tommy says so."

"Much obliged to Tommy, but I rather fancy what he said was that I am a cynic. However, you know best, my dear."

This last insult was too much for Delphine, who went away in disgust, while Olive continued to fold newspapers and plump up cushions and nip dead blooms out of Sladen's flower-bowls—for it was Sladen who kept No. 27 in flowers. When all the litter had been cleared away, and curtains drawn, fire raked into flame, and hearth swept clean, it was a rather tired-looking Olive who sat down at last to read the day's news in the *Telegraph*—an Olive whose attention wandered. Delphine's hair ribbon and Denis Hay's nose played havoc with the Home Rule Debate, and Julian's expansive telegram—Julian carried on most of his correspondence by telegram—crept in among the Balkan disorders. Why was she

worried? Heads of families are always worried when their children are growing up, and although, on principle, Olive was humbly ready to let Delphine choose her own ribbon, in practice it was painful to imagine the beloved tresses tied up in taffetas or—who knows?—in tinsel or beads! And it were only ribbons! . . .

"Ulster will fight
And Ulster will be right" . . .

and Sladen, what was to be done about Sladen? And Julian too, gay Julian, dangerously bold, prepared to take a sledgehammer to the most delicate of knots—what possessed Julian to linger in the neighbourhood of Laleham Chase? "Unrest in Servia" . . . Martin's home of Laleham Chase. . . . She gave it up at last and sat gazing into the flames, her hands clasped in a rare fit of idleness, her thoughts so far away that she did not stir even when the door opened to let in Leigh. . . .

"How do you do? Delphine gave me leave to come in."

Not Leigh, but Martin Laleham.

Olive sat still by the fire, and Martin with his soft step and soft voice came up to her holding out his hand. "I'm afraid I startled you." Uninvited, he slipped out of the light coat that he wore over his evening dress, and drew up a chair. "But I met Delphine and Leigh on the stairs just going out and they told me to announce myself. How pretty Delphine is growing! It seems only the other day that she was trotting about in strap shoes, and now she's nearly as tall as you are."

"Mr Laleham! Is it really you? I didn't know you were in town."

"I came up Friday night. There's a big sale on at Christie's. What have I done to be called Mr Laleham? Am I to call you Miss Charnwood, as Julian does when he speaks of you to me? There was a time when I called you Princess Fair-Star."

Leaning forward in his low chair, he was almost on one knee by Olive: her skirt brushed his fingers, and his deep, unsatisfied eyes were riveted on her face. She threw herself back on her cushions and put up her hand as if hurt, while a rush of colour—Olive's dark, unready colour—sprang to her cheek.

"Oh don't, don't, Martin!"

"Don't—what?"

"Watch me like that. Oh, your eyes are so sad! I can't bear it."

"Why don't you have mercy on me then?" said Martin very gently, and not as one who uses metaphor but in all sobriety: nor was it possible to doubt him: he did need some mercy. "I can't help worshipping you . . . Olive, will it never be any good?"

"No, never."

"Oh, my dearest! . . . I'm making you unhappy."

"Yes, you are," Olive broke out in passion, "wretchedly unhappy. I made sure you had forgotten me long ago. You haven't seen me for two years. I've kept diligently out of your way ever since that last scene at Greys. Oh, I can't, I can't begin it all over again! I've given you your answer twice: it's unmanly of you to press me for another."

"Agreed," said Martin, white as his handkerchief. "But it was you who began it this time, not I. Is it my fault if my eyes betray me? Am I to pretend that I don't admire you? You're very beautiful."

"Handsome, am I? if I were as old and ugly as I feel, you would soon be cured."

"That is bitter."

"It is the truth. I'm the mother of a family, Martin, with a baby of seventeen: think of all the work and worries and material agitations that are crowded into a life like mine!" She was smiling now and more composed, but there was profound sadness under her irony. "No, my dear! if you could see me as I am you would fly off in alarm and never come near me again: and for your sake I wish I had the courage to open your eyes, though there's no more painful sacrifice for a woman than to disenchant a man who . . . Now let's drop the subject, for it only hurts both of us. Have you had any tea?—Very well, but you'll have a cigarette and a whisky and soda. Do you still smoke Turkish? You used to like mine."

Martin, most abstemious of men, accepted the whisky and soda and put in more whisky than soda. He had not bargained for such a reception. He had not intended to renew his offer, if Olive had not taken him by surprise. And coming back to the fire he stood looking down on her. How foolish it was of her—in any other woman one would have taken it for an affectation, but Olive was transparently sincere—to call herself old, when there was not a line on her brow nor blemish nor hollow on her beautiful shoulders! She was in unrelieved black without flower or gem, but hers was that classic beauty for

which ornament is a superfluity if not a disguise. Lying back in her chair, her shapely head erect under its dark wreath, her deep bosom and long slender limbs immobile in profound repose, an old-fashioned silk dress —the dress of her portrait—leaving bare the slope of her ivory throat and the inset of her ivory arm, she abandoned herself to his examination as if she were unconscious of it or as if it soothed her: Greek in her beauty, and Greek in her strong serenity, not afraid to be silent.

And he was soothed, he too, for in mental as in physical pain there come intervals of unexplained relief, when the keener torment subsides into an ache, and the ache into languor, and then over every relaxing nerve there steals a heavenly glow of warmth and *bien-être:* and so for Martin the long ache of loneliness and desire, which had become part of his life during the last two or three years, was imperceptibly lulled into heart's-ease. How many and many a time, out of doors on horseback, at a dance, or in his bed at night, had the longing for Olive seized and racked him till he came near to losing control! Now he was so close to her that he could hear her faint even breathing and inhale the scent of lavender that always clung round her clothes; and the poet in Martin, which he had done his best to stifle under the country gentleman, was strong enough to make him content for a while with the mere neighbourhood of the beloved.

". . . And so you only came up on Friday. Well, and what do you think of Julian? He sent me one of his famous wires this morning, full of Laleham and you and Sophy: he seems to have been struck with Sophy, by the by."

"I always liked Julian," said Martin smiling. "Regarded as the eldest of your family, he does you credit. He will probably die President of Peru."

"And Mr Hay?"

"Ah! that's a different matter. I came up expressly to converse with you about Mr Hay—at least that was my intention. On my honour I'm not sure that I haven't been juggling with my conscience—whether I had really any other motive than the desire to see you again! But that is forbidden ground. To return to Hay: may I ask you a few questions about him?"

"Whatever you like: but I know very little."

"Who is he?"

"The son of a man who kept an inn at Mollendo, where Julian used to put up."

"How pleasant for Julian! But you like Hay, don't you?"

"More than like him," said Olive with the warmth of innocence and preoccupation. "He was only here ten days, and yet we all felt as if he were one of the family. Delphine has just been pining for him to come back, Leigh and Walter liked him immensely, even Sladen behaved impeccably while he was here. He calls out the best in people, he is so transparently genuine and kindly, and so unwilling to see their faults." After this Martin would have ceased to be jealous of Denis if love had left him any common sense at all. "But what has happened at Laleham to bring you here?"

Few and faint and deft were the touches of Martin's descriptive pencil. "Trivial isn't it? yet I'm puzzled. My father is frightened; and it's not like him to be afraid of anyone. Of course I ought to tackle him, but

I can't: my experience is that the only people with whom one can never be frank are one's own near relations." Olive sighed, remembering Delphine and the hair ribbon: how long before Delphine would feel the same of her? "I love my father," Martin continued in his slow, easy voice. "He has been very good to me all my life. "I couldn't discuss him with anyone but you: nor perhaps even with you if it weren't that—that——"

"That you trust me, I hope."

"Ah! profoundly.—And that some one ought to be looking after him. Some one always has to look after my father," Martin smiled fleetingly. "How is it? one can't call him a weak man, and yet he is too sensitive and too wilful to fight for his own hand."

"You're right, and I'd help you if I could, but Denis is not easy to read. What's the matter—is the fire scorching your face?" Poor Martin, who had never given up hope, winced involuntarily under Olive's familiar use of the Christian name, which reminded him that other men were enjoying an intimacy from which he was debarred. But he took the *Telegraph* which she gave him and held it up before his face, preferring to be misunderstood. "He is simple," Olive continued, "one of those men who never see more than one thing at a time. He is so direct that I should think he might, unconsciously, be cruel: and there's a vein of stupidity in him that makes him difficult to deal with. Probably he and Lord Laleham would find no common ground at all. You two might, because you are a full generation younger than Lord Laleham, and his doctrinaire liberalism has sunk deep into you."

"Has it?" said Martin amused. "I'm not much of a

politician, I'm afraid. But perhaps you weren't thinking of politics.—So you have no theory about Hay?"

"I had one: I thought he was the son of Mr Delahay and the first Lady Laleham."

"Good heavens!"

"But I was wrong, Martin. He denied it, and I am sure he was speaking the truth."

"Yes, yes: I am sure of that too."

The distress in Martin's face startled Olive. "Why, what is it you fear?"

"Not that he was Delahay's son. By all I ever heard, Delahay was a dirty little rascal. They say he believed that my stepmother—poor child, she was scarcely older than Delphine!—had a lot of money of her own: this I know, that when he found himself hard up with her on his hands he didn't scruple to write begging letters to my father."

"And Lord Laleham——?"

Martin gave an untranslateable shrug. "Made him an allowance. Trelawny, our lawyer, arranged it. Those two—Heaven only knows if the woman was aware of it—lived on his money till she died."

"What a wretch! No, Denis couldn't be his son."

"I wish he were."

"Martin!"

"My dear, even a sentimentalist like my father is not so Quixotic as to let himself be blackmailed by the son of an Edward Delahay! If he were cad enough to try it on one could soon be rid of him. At most one might prefer to give him half a crown to go away quietly! No, if he touches us at all it's on the other side."

"Oh, my dear Martin! But your father——"

"Is a saint: and the price that he pays for being a saint is a natural reluctance to own that he's ever been a sinner."

"Yet I don't follow," said Olive. Martin, who had sprung up and was pacing the room—a habit learnt in the restlessness of poetic inspiration—turned round towards her with a gleam of humour. But Olive laughed at him with her mocking eyes. "Oh no, I am not so innocent as to require a footnote! But Denis is proud, you may take my word for that: if he were Lord Laleham's illegitimate son, I can't see him trading on his birth."

"Has it occurred to you what relation he would be of mine, in that event?"

"Why—your brother, of course: your half-brother."

"Very well: I feel as though he were my brother."

"Do you mean that you're fond of him?"

"*Fond* of him!" Martin repeated with all the indignation of an Englishman accused of a sentiment. "I've only seen him twice in my life! No, but there is some sort of tie between us. I've felt it all along: and, now I come to think of it, Sophy felt it too—the innocent Sophy! It's the primal voice of Nature," Martin ended with an exasperated laugh: he had not expected Nature to have any voice for a being so highly sophisticated as himself.

"You may be right," said Olive thoughtfully. "One knows how many an honourable man has had to pay for a slip in youth. But when—? Lord Laleham married young, and was in love with his wife."

"In the interregnum: after she deserted him and before he married my mother."

"Making Denis a year or two older than you are. That would fit. But what about Denis himself? Dear Denis, Julian's best friend: the simplest and most straightforward of men!"

"And isn't it precisely to a man like Hay, simple and natural, that the relationship might present itself in its naked simplicity? Sonship and brotherhood are, after all, links of iron, universally valued. To Hay the bend sinister might seem a mere point of—heraldry. He might be guileless enough to see himself not in the wrong, but wronged. He might even hope to be acknowledged!"

"Ah! poor Denis!" sighed Olive.

"He is at least lucky in his ally."

Martin's pain had begun again. Ah! that bitter pain of unsatisfied desire, that passion of the night watches, which ever defeats itself by its own violence and falls back exhausted! Martin sat down again, languidly leaning his head on his hand and fixing his dark eyes on the red glowing coals: and Olive, his attention once diverted, fixed her own eyes upon him and watched him covertly from under her long lashes as if she could never have enough of watching him. Perhaps she divined that his thoughts had travelled far away from Denis, for she too was silent, and for a long while there was not a sound in the room except a faint whispering of flame and a fainter, occasional rustle of silk at Olive's breast. At length a distant church clock struck eight, and she roused herself, sitting erect in her chair and gently touching him on the arm.

"Martin, I have a favour to ask you."

"To the half of my fortune."

"Don't make rash promises. The others will be in

directly, and I shan't see you again after to-night, perhaps for another two years, or ten or twenty. . . . You were jealous, a moment ago, of poor Denis. Ah! foolish one!" Her hand, cool as a flower-petal, touched his face, his lips, his eyes. "Denis does not care a straw for me, as you would see if you were in your sober senses; but if he did it would make no difference. I shall not marry Denis or you or any man: I shall never marry. If you love me, for my sake take this as final. Remember me as if I were dead. So far as love and marriage goes, I am dead. I am not a very happy woman, but I should be happier if you would forget me."

"I've been trying to forget you for some time, but not with much success."

"Act as if you had forgotten, then. Marry."

"Is this the small favour you were going to ask me?"

"It isn't in you to treat a woman unkindly, I know you too well for that. You would begin with courtesy and end in devotion. You're a thorough Englishman! You have a deep, constant nature, but not at all emotional, and instinct leads you to cover up your scars: you don't glory in them as a Frenchman would: you're even secretly a little ashamed of them, because passion is to you a weakness from which a perfectly-governed Englishman ought to be exempt. That's why you have never taken refuge in the ordinary resources of a young man crossed in love. Have you?" Martin's face was like ice. "You don't choose to answer me, but I know you have not. I should be very sorry if you had. But marriage isn't a mere anodyne. Duties enter into it, and principles, and a balancing of debt. This trouble of yours is half of it nerves and imagination. So long as you nurse it you

won't be cured, but if you were married and your sense of duty were enlisted on the side of your inclinations, if you had a pretty girl to talk to by firelight and not a worn-out ghost like me— Am I making you very angry?"

"Very."

There was certainly no trace of passion in the keen sarcastic smile that seemed to make mock of Olive's wisdom. Disconcerted, even painfully so, she blushed and let fall her long lashes. "But, Martin . . . if you do still love me . . ."

"If."

"Or even if it's only that you can't forget what you no longer feel . . . you owe, a man in your position owes a duty to his family. Lord Laleham would hate me if he knew I was to blame. Laleham Chase ought to go from father to son."

Martin's eyes flashed in spite of himself. "I ask no better."

"Then you will do this one thing for me?"

"No, I won't. If any son of mine ever succeeds to Laleham, you will be his mother."

"*Martin!*"

"Apologies, and all that."

Olive was very pale. "Not for your unconventionality, but for your persistent importunity. It isn't very good form, is it, to besiege a woman who only begs to be left alone?"

"No, I'm afraid not," said Martin smiling. "But form isn't the only consideration when one is as much in love as I am . . . Oh, my God, Olive——!"

The door opened, and Sladen strolled in. "Hullo, Martin Laleham," he said, rapidly distinguishing both

figures with his Indian eyesight and Indian phlegm, "I didn't know you were in town. Dear me, you both look quite startled! So sorry I came in without knocking. Olive, my sweet sister, Delphine is in the next room with Selwyn and Tommy Wyatt, and is pressing them to stay to supper. I am truly grieved to disturb you at an inopportune moment, but I can't find the key of the cellarette."

CHAPTER XI

"Martin," said Lord Laleham to his second son, "I hear that fellow Hay is staying on at Greys. Will you oblige me by not seeing any more of him?'

Martin shook the ash from his cigarette and offered its glowing tip to Jane, who was sitting on his knee. Jane wrinkled up her nose and sneezed fretfully, and Martin flicked a white hair from the sleeve of his dinner jacket.

"Father, I should be grateful if you would give me your confidence."

"I have none to give," replied Lord Laleham, lying with a steady face and a sick heart. "I know more of him than you do and it's not to his credit: that's all."

"If that is really all"—Lord Laleham winced—"I can't, on such indeterminate grounds and without a shadow of pretext, cut a fellow dead who has dined here on my invitation. I hate quarrelling with my neighbours."

"Propinquity is not neighbourhood."

"But you like Frank yourself."

"But I don't like all the tagrag and bobtail of his disreputable relations! Understand me, Martin, I won't have any of the Bloomsbury lot inside my door again. The girls are barely respectable, and as for the men——!"

"As you please," said Martin very coldly. "But you must allow me to go on being civil to him when we meet."

Lord Laleham got to his feet with a nervous movement and left the room, and Martin sat on alone in the early

April twilight, rubbing Jane behind her ears while his cigarette smouldered out unheeded. The little dog adored her master and scented something wrong. She planted her forepaws on Martin's chest and nuzzled up against his cheek. "Poor sort of world, isn't it, Jane?" said Martin softly. "What do you say, little dog—shall we cut the tagrag and bobtail?" Jane affectionately licked his nose, and Martin framed her head between his hands and kissed the white blaze on her forehead.

"My half-brother! It's a link. Why can't father be honest with me? He of all men to stoop to these miserable shifts! and he does it so badly, too: he wouldn't cut half such a poor figure if . . . Yet after all it's hard for a man to confess his youthful indiscretions to his own son. Shall we cut Mr Denis Hay, Jane—and quarrel with Julian? For I can't go to Greys if I cut Hay. —Oh God! why can't I forget her?" Jane whimpered faintly. "Olive herself may be coming to Greys now. Julian talked of bringing her down.

"If she does I shall clear out and go and live in town. Although I'm not—what was it?—not ardent, I draw the line at living within a mile of her on a friendly footing. . . . I deserve it all and more than all. Why can't I take no for an answer? Because I never can believe that you aren't mine, Olive, mine in your own despite if I had the courage to take you in my arms, mine to the last thread of that dark hair of yours and the last veil. . . ." He was shivering, though the night was warm. "Shall we make a poem about it, little dog? *Desire* and *fire*, eh?" He had not written a line since the last scene with Olive. "How did the other fellows do it? I composed sonnets enough to her eyebrow in the early days, but I

couldn't write a verse to-night to save my life. Jinny, your master's in a bad way."

"Never mind, dear," said Jinny. "I love you."

And from the library Lord Laleham went straight to his own desk, and sat down and wrote a cheque, payable to "Mr Denis Hay," for £1000. "Take that to the post at once, James." Ten minutes after it was gone he would have given another thousand pounds to have it back. What madness had guided his pen? He had secured no immunity: on the contrary, if the case ever came into court, the cheque itself would count against him, since men don't pay blackmail unless hard driven. Marvelling at his own folly, he searched his memory, but could find no motive except terror and a vague hope of propitiating Denis, and an even vaguer hope of seducing him. "Set a beggar on horseback" . . . give a young man money to burn for the first time in his life, and the odds are that he will rush off and burn it. Now at Greys under the Baptist rule of Uncle Jack there were no facilities for a bonfire. Even in the icy grip of second thoughts, Lord Laleham still hoped to hear that Denis had run over to Paris: but he was doomed to a bitter disappointment, and one that left him angrier than ever with "the Bloomsbury lot."

Julian and Denis were breakfasting together when Lord Laleham's letter came—a small grey envelope, not to be mistaken, with its small black ringed L and smaller coronet on the flap: and Julian had rarely felt more startled than when his eye lit on the slip of pink paper that dropped out of it. "Dear me!" said Denis mildly,

"that's very odd! He's sent me a cheque for a thousand pounds."

"Who has?"

"Lord Laleham."

"How kind of him!"

"Isn't it? And not a line of writing with it." He peeped into the empty envelope. "No—only a blank half-sheet." He stuffed the cheque into his exceedingly shabby pocketbook. "Now I shall be able to open a banking account. I've never had one before. Oh, and to pay Mr Burnaby's bill. I am glad, I do hate owing people money."

"Are you going to keep it?"

"Why not?"

"A thousand pounds, and thrown at you without a word?"

"Well, would it be more than he allows Martin?" Denis got up from the table. "You keep forgetting I'm his son." He strolled out into the garden, and Julian watched him contentedly puffing smoke over a rosebush out of an old clay pipe as if at peace with all the world except greenfly.

No, running over to Paris was not in Denis's line. All he asked was to mark time and study the lie of the land: and all Lord Laleham's cheque did was to give him room and leisure.

And Julian asked no more questions because, though not without hesitation, he trusted his friend. His wavering was due to doubt of Denis's judgment, his final silence to faith in Denis's instincts. Julian himself smoked many pipes in the garden of Greys before his course

came clear, for Denis was always a mystery to him, they were at opposite poles—Julian prompt in action but no thinker, Denis slow of deed, vague of word, but crystal clear of mind, ruling a line between the province of conscience and the province of judgment, and not hoodwinked by gratitude (since to bare justice none is due) nor entangled in imaginary moral obligations: but in the end, "A man is what he is, and does what he does," said the Head of the Family to Frank Charnwood's herbaceous border. "If there's any shady work going on it's Laleham's doing. I *know* Denis wouldn't do it." So he fell back on that impregnable rock of faith: "because I am I—because you are you."

Meanwhile there could be no halting on Julian's own line of march. He had come to England to raise his family to a higher social level and raised they were to be. It was evidence of a certain stupidity in him that at one time he thought of getting Walter into an Inebriates' Home. As he grew to know his brother better, and old affections revived, this bright idea died a natural death, and fortunately without having been broken to Olive, but with regard to Sladen there came no saving second thoughts. He did not much like Sladen—few did: and he did not like his sisters to mix in Sladen's set. The first step was to get the girls out of town. Olive, seeing visions of Delphine in county society, agreed; she loved the old house in Bloomsbury Square, and she was unerringly sure that Julian was going to be unfair to Sladen, but Delphine came first, and neither Sladen nor Leigh would grumble so long as the pet lamb was better off. Leigh would have to go into rooms with Walter, that was

all, and Sladen would drift more and more into his own set.

Then Julian took a plunge into the sea of house agents. He bought a car—it was characteristic of Julian that it really was the property of a gentleman going to India, who let his nearly new Raymond-Ray go for the price of a Ford—and went spinning down into Surrey, into Bucks, into Kent, to visit desirable residences. Before anything was settled, however, events took a turn which played, as usual, into Julian's hands. Mr Jack Charnwood, a rheumatic subject, caught a chill in an April wetting and was ordered to Nauheim for a cure; and Frank, the cripple, immediately proposed wintering abroad and letting the house to Julian for a twelvemonth. He wanted to let his cousin have it on nominal terms, but Julian demurred and Mr Charnwood was not enthusiastic, and Denis, after listening for some time in silence, cut in with an offer to go shares with Julian, each paying half the rent. This transferred the case to a business footing, and Uncle Jack clenched his bargain on the spot, to Julian's joy. Greys was what he had set his heart on all along, and in the twilight of his mind there lurked a hope that Uncle Jack might take a fancy to foreign parts and stay away for ever. He had already got Frank to promise him the refusal of it when it came into the market on Mr Charnwood's death. In the interim he was delighted to share it with Denis, for wasn't Denis practically one of the family? and Julian was economical too, and liked—who doesn't?—spending a sixpence better than a shilling.

So midway through April they entered on their joint

tenancy, and Lord Laleham had the pleasure of reflecting that it was he who had financed the pretender at his door.

Greys was a rambling anomaly in plaster and timber and eighteenth century brickwork. It lay off the road on a gentle rise, turning its back on church and mill and overhanging chalk range and the giant scar of a quarry, and its sunny front to the south. The living rooms opened on a quaint brick verandah, and this on a terrace of turf which dropped by grass steps and a brickwork balustrade to green lawns below, and green fields through which the shallow Fleet, glinting like wire, twined along towards the black woods of Laleham. Three quarters of a mile away rose up the fawn-coloured towers of the Chase, pricking out the tops of a quadrangle over a foam of beech-buds, and behind them, dimmed by violet sea-haze or precipitated by the coming of rain into a featured clearness, lay a chain of coastal hills. Westward, in a rift between headlands, the sea ran up into a long inlet; and now the sun struck it into diamonds, and now the lights of a ship far out winked in it and were gone, and continually through the gap the voices of ocean-going sirens were blown, and a salt Atlantic breath stole up and was mixed with the garden sweetness of heliotrope and roses. Denis used to fancy himself back in Mollendo when he woke on a misty morning and heard the great foghorns wailing far away.

Heliotrope and roses: for the garden had been Frank Charnwood's care. Had his father's taste prevailed, the beds would have been full of calceolarias and geraniums, and unluckily for Julian the house was decorated in the

same style, its dark, quaint, and shapely rooms brightened up with Wilton carpets and Lincrusta dadoes and fumed-oak suites. A Queen Anne staircase had had a merciful escape; but a marbled paper of the eighties covered linenfold panels in a wainscoted hall. As soon as his uncle's back was turned Julian went all over Greys from garret to cellar, and when he returned from his pilgrimage he was not far off tears. He had found family portraits in the attic and Chippendale chairs in the pantry, and sitting on the edge of a gilt console with one breeched and booted leg cocked over the head of a Utrecht velvet sofa he lifted up his voice and mourned.

"Somehow I never took it in before," he said, "not the full horror of it. One doesn't when one's only a visitor. And we've been out of doors so much, or in Frank's rooms, which are an oasis. But when it comes to bringing Olive down! It's, it's, it's, it's, I don't know what it is. It's hellish. The very servants aren't civilised. Going up the back stairs this morning I met a female housemaid in a mop cap and pink bows, like a Cake and Cocoa waitress, who looked at me as if she expected me to kiss her. Do you think Uncle Jack used to kiss these fairies? I'm sure Frank didn't. I shall have to re-staff and re-furnish."

"But you can't, can you, when it's not your house?"

Julian grinned. "I wonder if Uncle Jack would mind if I had the hall paper stripped? I'll wire him to-day and find out. Or would it be a pity to worry him when he's in such a dilapidated state of health? He certainly couldn't object to new carpets and curtains because he can have his own pink moss back any time he likes. Perhaps we could change some of them over: there's a

ripping old Spanish carpet in one of the big attics which would cover quite enough of this floor. By jove, it would look nice! I expect it went out of here when he bought the pink moss. This is all parquet, you see." He poked with his stick at the edge of the Wilton, dislodged a nail or two, and hooked up a flap.

"I can't," said Denis with the mild firmness which he could occasionally command, "have you turning Uncle Jack's house upside down without telling him. Stop poking that carpet, Julian, do."

"Perhaps you're right," conceded Julian. "He might cut me out of his will. What he *ought* to do is to pay my expenses. It'll cost a devil of a lot of money to make this place habitable." He sighed. "But then you pay half the rent, which is a great score. All right, I'll wire him this morning and get him to give me a free hand: he's a good-natured old fellow and Frank will back me up. It's a nuisance all the same, because I meant to bring the girls down at once."

"But they wouldn't mind, would they?"

"N-no," said Julian, but his voice was half-hearted, and after a little pressing out came the grievance. It was to have been a secret, "a surprise," as little boys say; in some ways Julian was a schoolboy himself; Olive was to hear nothing till he could telegraph to her to come and take possession. Denis, who had an adult's distrust of "surprises," privately wondered if Olive would not rather have been consulted beforehand, but hadn't the heart to say so, and Julian, after a good deal of indecision, concluded to let things go on as they were for the present. So Olive was left in the dark, while Julian wired to Mr Charnwood and was given a free hand so long as he was

prepared, on demand, to pay for a restoration of the *status quo*.

Then Julian flung himself into a discreet renovation, or rather archaicisation, of Greys. The pink moss went upstairs and the faded Mallorquin came down; gilt console and velvet sofa were stowed away in a dry shed: voluminous curtains, fringed and sashed, gave place to a few folds of shiny chintz, and the fine, stiff, Queen Anne furniture of an earlier generation, relieved of its parvenu neighbours, came gratefully into its own heritage again of space and subdued colouring and wide flowery outlooks. In these changes it need hardly be said that Denis had no voice. He had no affection for Queen Anne and no objection to pink moss, and if anyone but Julian had danced a Highland fling when the paper came off in the hall Denis would have set him down as either insane or effeminate. He was more interested in the stables—an hereditary taste, as Julian reflected, for Lord Laleham had once belonged to the Four-in-Hand Club and was still a familiar figure on the Turf. Denis had ridden all his life, though the manners and paces of Julian's silken-coated aristocrats were a revelation to a man used to mules and half-broken mustangs. Martin ran across him in Countisford one morning in Joe Emmett's yard, and was agreeably surprised to find that Denis was more than a match for Joe Emmett: and Martin took his brother off to the Mitre, where they met Sophy and Julian, and all four lunched off bread and cheese and beer, and rode home in company after an illicit but merry meal. And though Martin was a poet, and Sophy a Socialist, both of them liked Denis the better for being already on easy terms with his big half-bred, hammer-

headed chestnut. "Once when I was in Mollendo I had a horse I loved," he confided to Sophy. "He went like anything. He was called El Misti, and he *was* a gentleman, except that he ate you if you came off."

He was much less at ease with the couple of well-trained menservants whom Julian brought down from town. He was frightened of them, and confessed it to Julian, who stared.

"Afraid of Littledale? Afraid what of?"

"Of doing the wrong thing and catching his eye," said Denis meekly.

"Nonsense! he hasn't an eye. To hear you, one would think servants were human beings!"

"Well, aren't they?"

"Not in the shires, thank God. You feed 'em and pay 'em and tell 'em what to do and they do it, and that's all there is to it. And it's what I came home for—to live among a submissive proletariat."

"But, Julian, you don't really believe all that?"

"Who, I? No: I don't consider any man my superior or inferior. But Littledale isn't living in Utopia and wouldn't like it if he were. I knew a Don in Cambridge once who tried to lead the simple life on democratic lines. He and his wife kept a maid of all work who was drilled to call them Dick and Norah, and they ate nuts together in the kitchen. Before the end of a twelvemonth they were at the University Arms because Gladys wouldn't stay in the house. Moral: truckle to a duke and bully a footman if you want a quiet life in the shires."

"Well, I call that beastly; at least it would be if you meant it. Anyhow it's no good to me because I couldn't do it. Littledale isn't a submissive proletariat, he knows

ever so much more about the Etiquette of Society than I do, and he—he looks at me."

"He probably knows more about the Etiquette of Society than I do, because I never knew much and I've forgotten most of it, but if I caught him looking at me I should see to it that he transferred his attentions elsewhere," said Julian trenchantly. "Never let anything pass. Then they respect you. My good Denis, if you can't keep your own servants in order I'm sorry for you."

"Don't care, I can't," said Denis: "and," plucking up spirit, "no more can plenty of other people. Martin told me the other day that his man never does anything he wants him to, nor Sophy's maid either. He says he never will let him wear knickerbockers except for shooting because he has thin legs; and Sophy's maid won't give her early morning tea because it's indigestible. He said her maid gets a fortnight off every summer and she looks forward to it from one year's end to another. He says she always implores her to take a month, but she won't."

"Just like Sophy!" said Julian tenderly.

Lord Laleham was no coward. But he was frightened now. What did the fellow mean, what did he want? Was he content with his solatium? Lord Laleham dared not even hope so. £1000 was not enough, or too much: it was not enough for a bribe: yet it implied timidity and weakness, qualities irresistibly tempting to a blackmailer. He was accustomed to lean on Martin, but as for confiding in him now, he would sooner have walked up to a loaded rifle. Martin would never have sent that cheque! Far down under all his gentleness lay the iron of a hard unyielding pride. Besides, the young man

owned to having taken a liking to Denis, and after that who could say what other wild and disastrous fancy he might catch up? Poor Lord Laleham, frightened and ashamed, wanted a warm uncritical support, and when it failed him he began to feel very sore. There was no quarrel between father and son, but they drifted into a polite constraint which the elder man found it hard to bear.

And then again it was not to be expected that the neighbourhood should turn its back on Julian Charnwood. A handsome and agreeable young man with plenty of money, long before the paperhangers were out of the house cards were raining on him, and on Denis as his guest. The young Ritualist vicar walked up one afternoon with an eye to his subscriptions, and was beguiled into playing Badminton in a barn. Philip Smith, long-legged and taciturn, dragged himself over to see what he could get out of Julian for the Hunt, and spent the rest of the day laying carpets and hanging pictures. Lady John Mostyn, the sociable wife of a very shy husband, heard or said she had heard that Miss Charnwood was at Greys, and managed not to find out her mistake till Julian was giving her tea. Fathers of unmarried daughters came after as long delay as their wives allowed. The returned exiles soon found themselves surrounded by that genuine English kindness which is none the less sincere because it rests on a practical foundation of give and take. Julian and Denis, who had no quarrel with social systems, welcomed it as warmly as it welcomed them, but for Lord Laleham, thrown against them in his friends' houses and at all the small entertainments of a country summer, it was gall and wormwood.

An unforeseen development was the springing up of an intimacy between Denis and Sladen Charnwood. Sladen was in the secret of Greys—it was as impossible to keep a secret from Sladen as to wring one out of him—and he used to come down for week-ends when he could get away from the *Messenger*, and criticise Julian's taste. Sladen laid no carpets. He laid himself on cushions on the lawn, and worked his way through a box of Julian's expensive cigarettes till the grass was a nest of ash and lucifers. And when he could he liked to get Denis to sit and listen to the pithy, disconnected *faits divers* of politics and passion, of Agar Street and Continental life, which he drawled out in his clear low voice. Sladen had liked Denis from the first: he said that Denis was stupid in such a soothing way.

Denis had not liked Sladen, but his kind tolerant nature was soon won over. Most of us like those who like us. He even went so far as to put in a good word for him with Julian, who was inclined to resent Sladen's trick of dropping in uninvited. "It does him good to get down into the country for a few hours," Denis pleaded. "And he can't write beforehand because he never knows when he can get off. Last time when you were so annoyed because he fell asleep in the punt and never came in till the middle of dinner and Mr Smith was here, he hadn't been to bed all night. He works awfully hard."

"Bosh!" said the uncompromising Head of the Family. "He's the laziest little beggar alive." He was ashamed to own that he would have been less annoyed if Sladen had not come in at all while Philip Smith was there. "I've a warm quarter of an hour laid up for Master Sladen when I've time to attend to him. This isn't his house."

"N-no," said Denis, thoughtfully rubbing his nose, "but it isn't *all* yours either, is it?" Julian was speechless. "You often have fellows to stay and I never do, I'll have Sladen for one of mine."

It may freely be owned that Sladen neither desired nor deserved much honour in his own country. Agar Street liked him, not because its morals were elastic, but because Sladen in Agar Street was a different man from Sladen at Greys. But he was a sport of journalism, and Marsh the dramatic critic used to say that he couldn't think why the *Messenger* had not shot him out long ago. His clothes were cut in Sackville Street, he went about in cabs, he wore a diamond ring of considerable value, he had no fixed income beyond what the *Messenger* paid him, and he was never short of money. At the office it was vaguely supposed that he "did a bit" in the City. He played billiards and bridge remarkably well and was a lucky player. Too lucky? Had that rumour reached the *Messenger* men they would have scouted it. His pale foreign face was well known at Tattersall's, and when he gave the *Messenger* a safe tip for the Newmarket it was treated with respect.

By what legerdemain do men of his class contrive to live, and live expensively? By getting into debt, is the natural reply, but Sladen was never deep in debt, though he was never out of it; he paid instalments periodically. A black sheep? No doubt, and yet he was good-natured, as black sheep often are—one might even call him magnanimous. After the famous dinner he kept out of the way when Philip Smith was there, and Denis asked him why.

"Little Brother Julian is striking a family attitude,"

came the clear sardonic drawl. "No skeletons, by desire."

It took Denis a moment to follow him, and then he was very angry. "Sladen, you little beast! You *know* Julian never would be such a thundering sneak!"

Stretched at ease on the lawn, Sladen winked a calm black eye at his companion. "I wonder how it would feel to have a mind like yours, my Denis?" he observed. "How strangely and how sweetly you remind me of my maiden aunt!"

Time ebbed away. Work at Greys went on slowly, after the manner of rural workmen. Olive supposed that Julian had dropped all thought of taking a country house, and was half glad, half sorry: she was equally anxious to get Delphine out of Bloomsbury and to keep Sladen in it. She believed Julian to be still the guest of Mr Jack Charnwood, and was surprised at the length of his stay: but a correspondence carried on exclusively by telegram is discouraging to speculation: and then too she was much taken up that spring not only with Delphine and Sladen and Walter but with the political outlook.

Olive had lived among men all her life, and shared their interests: she kept up a large irregular correspondence with friends all over the globe, who murmured "It's Olive, bless her," when her letters reached them in their lonely outposts, and sent her queer confidential scribbles in reply. Selwyn Yarborough, the painter, was the son of a Cabinet minister and spent half his life in Paris. Hurst—"Armenian Hurst"—was in his own phrase "always nosing round the Black Sea." Wright of the *Liberal* was faithful to the Balkans and had despatched

himself on a special mission to Belgrade. Queer hints were dropped by all of them, and queer news came through too from Sladen and Sladen's friends. She knew more of what was going on than Julian or Denis, for Denis scarcely knew a Communist from a Die-hard, and Julian had not yet picked up his dropped threads. But Olive and Sladen were among that not innumerous group for whom even the May suns of 1914 were ominous.

On an evening near the end of June Olive was darning a silk stocking of Delphine's when Sladen came in with an evening paper damp from the press and put it into her hand. Olive cried out "Oh Sladen! But that will mean"—and then broke off, meeting the insuppressible glitter of Sladen's eye. "Oh no, no!" she put up her hand: "you're a child, Sladen. It won't be fun, it will be horror beyond conception——"

"My sweet Olive," Sladen turned on his heel, "up at the limit, the horror is the fun."

But in the south of Dorsetshire there were no evening papers and when Lord Laleham read the news of Sarajevo over his breakfast table he was so little in touch with diplomatic life that he was very angry with barbarian Servia and very sorry for the hapless house of Hapsburg; while when Julian met Sophy in the post-office all he said was, "Sophy, do cut across this afternoon, you and Martin, just for five minutes. My chintz patterns have come and I can't stand any of them." For Martin, and occasionally Sophy, came to Greys under the rose, or to speak literally over the fields: Lord Laleham being aware but not informed of it—a subtle difference: a sad state of things, yet unavoidable, for who

but Sophy could decide between pink and blue chintz for Delphine's room, or choose Olive's carpet?—though in the latter event it was Martin who struck for a polished floor and a Persian rug.

CHAPTER XII

Julian's reactionary propaganda had no effect on Denis, who, like many silent persons, was little amenable to argument. But it worked well in practice, and Julian ran the household on his own lines with complete success. At length, on the Thursday before the end of July, when all the lawns were mown and all the oak was polished, when Greys shone from cellar to garret and there was not a leaf nor a petal astray in the garden, Julian announced that he was going to telegraph to Olive to come down "for a long week-end," and next morning Denis strolled in to breakfast to find Julian frowning over Olive's reply, which he was turning upside down and inside out in hope of getting a little light upon it.

"Did ever any man see such a Schrift?" he groaned, tossing it across the table. Denis examined it warily; at first he wasn't sure which was top and which was bottom, but he made out a date and heading, "Ctn. Cr.", in one corner, and so was guided to the "Dear Julian" over the way. Olive's family penmanship was a family joke. Her letters on business or to a friend were printed in round hand, like the message that Denis had once received about the bathroom, or they would not have been so popular as they were; but Julian had to put up with what Sladen described as her cursive writing.

"I should love to come but am afraid I had better not. In every way. So will despatch Delphine Waterloo 10.17 Countisford 1.15. Dearest Julian so sorry, I should have loved

to come. Thank you. Please meet Delphine. Probable avalanche of trunks.

O. M. C.

Take care of her!"

"Oh!" said Denis, outraged. "Olive not coming? What a shame!"

"Countisford 1.15," said Julian thoughtfully. "Yes, there is a 1.15 at Countisford. But why not Laleham Halt? Has she never been here since the Halt was opened? Apparently not, yet it must be all of three years ago. She fights shy of Laleham, does Olive. I say, Denis, be a good chap and take the dogcart in to meet the brat? Her things can come out by the carrier."

"Rather, of course I will. Only wouldn't Olive rather you went yourself?"

"Possibly," said Julian, pouring himself out a second cup of tea, which he drank standing. "But I shan't be here."

Twenty minutes later his grey torpedo-built Raymond-Ray took the road for London, Julian sitting low at the wheel and looking rather like a high-powered and expensive piece of machinery himself, with his far-seeing grey eyes and dangerously bland expression. He reached Bloomsbury soon after Delphine was due at Countisford and walked in on Olive just as she was rising from a late and solitary lunch. The house seemed quiet without Delphine's young voice in it, the *Times* made painful reading, and Miss Charnwood was feeling a little flat. After all she was only eight and twenty. It was not her way to consider her own likes and dislikes, but on this grey summer morning, when the moral atmosphere was

restless and full of heat and fear, she could not help longing to escape from Bloomsbury to the sunny thought-free air of Greys. Olive was entering now the shadow that was to darken Europe for more than four years to come. In England it was a strange composite shadow; not darkly bright with flaws of fire like the night that lay over combatant France, but a tiring, teasing gloom, without relief and too often without inspiration; a dreadful dragging ache of pity from which only the fighting services were comparatively free.

Thousands upon thousands of the non-combatants at whom it is now the fashion to sneer, the old men who from their comfortable armchairs in London clubs sent their sons to face dangers which they never would have faced themselves—so runs the cruel cant of the day—will remember that shadow to their life's end, and will remember too how under it their hair turned white and the spring went from their step: how secretly for fear of ridicule (since it certainly sounds absurd for a man to say "I wish I could fight: I would if I could," when he is perfectly safe from being taken at his word), they rebelled against the natural laws which doomed them to that warm armchair and the repining of a civilian.

But Olive was still only in the penumbra of anxiety. She had not yet realised that there was to be no more escaping it at Greys than in Bloomsbury, and when Julian burst in she sprang up with an irrepressible and youthful cry of pleasure: "Julian! you here?"

"Pack your kit," said Julian. "You're coming back with me."

"But didn't you get my letter? What have you done with Delphine?"

"Denis is meeting Delphine. Now don't argue, because I shall stand no nonsense. I'll have some of that cold beef while I'm waiting," Julian added, cutting himself a liberal plateful. "Is there any beer going?"

"Plenty, in the cellarette. But, Julian, I told you I wasn't coming!"

"My good girl, you've got to come. How on earth can Delphine stay there without a chaperon?"

"Not stay with her own uncle?"

"Uncle Jack's in Germany. There's no one at Greys but Denis and I."

Olive dropped into a chair. "But why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"How could I, in a wire?"

"Why didn't you write a letter?"

"A letter?" repeated Julian. Letters apparently did not come within his purview. "Well, I might have: but it never occurred to me. Besides, I thought it would be such a jolly surprise for you. Denis and I have taken Greys between us over next winter, and I've been working like a galley-slave to get it into decent order, because it would have been such fun to spring it on you when you came down there; but you've spoilt all that. This beer's warm."

"It's been in here all the morning. Sladen had a glass when he came in to take Delphine to Waterloo. He had been up half the night."

"Up all night! and drinking beer at nine in the morning! He's an ass, is Sladen. Why didn't you tell him to go to a pub? What had he been doing all night? he didn't tell you that, I suppose."

"He was at the *Messenger* office. There's a good deal

going on behind the scenes, you know," said Olive mildly. "Haven't you seen a paper yet? you must have come off in a tearing hurry."

"Oh, you mean this rotten war scare?" returned Julian uninterested. "Yes, it looks pretty black: I shouldn't wonder if we were dragged in before they're through. But that doesn't alter the fact that Sladen is a young ass, and I propose to let him know it. Meanwhile there's nobody but Salter to look after my car." He laid his watch on the table. "Now you look here: I give you twenty minutes, and if your bag's not packed by then you'll jolly well go without. See?"

"Oh Julian, Julian," said Olive, half-laughing, "are you going to kidnap me? I'll come, dear boy, because of Delphine, and I shall love to come for my own sake, but you mustn't do this sort of thing again. I'm very sorry to be ungracious and spoil your beautiful surprise, but I did not wish to go to Laleham and I shall never be able to stay there."

"Because of Martin?" said Julian coolly.

"Surely Martin hasn't——?"

"No: but I happen to have eyes and ears in my head, and Leigh dropped a hint. I can't see what odds it makes to you."

"It's so awkward to be always meeting him."

"Let him clear out then. It's up to him to go—to Jericho or a warmer climate: the sooner the better."

"Be fair, old boy. Laleham is his home and Greys was never mine. If he did clear out—and I dare say he would if I went there—think how guilty and uncomfortable I should feel! I've done mischief enough without that. Besides, it isn't only Martin. Sophy is always

flinging herself into my arms; and Lord and Lady Laleham are barely civil."

Julian wiped his moustache very carefully on Olive's napkin and got up and walked over to the window. He did not explain to Olive that Sophy would not now ask her to Laleham. For some time past, a mysterious inhibition had made him shy of Sophy's name. He stood at ease, his hands lightly clasped behind him, exhaling animosity from head to heel. After a moment Olive followed him and tucked a soothing hand under his arm. She loved him in these fighting moods, and they touched a sympathetic chord in her own breast, for she was not so meek as to enjoy being snubbed by Lady Laleham, but it seemed to be mainly with Martin that he was angry now, and she knew that dangerous wintry smile too well to have any loophole for misunderstanding.

"July," she said, giving him his old childish nickname, "it isn't Martin's fault."

"Has he ever asked you to marry him?"

"Three times."

"He *has?*—Then why on earth don't you?"

"Because I'd rather not."

"Because you're afraid of his people!"

"It would make no difference if they went down on their knees to me."

"Leigh swore you were in love with him."

"Oh no, he didn't!" Olive shook her head. "That is a little gloss of your own, dear. I am sure the utmost you got out of Leigh was that he rather thought I rather liked him."

"It's all one!" Irreticent Julian, who rarely hid a feeling of his own, had turned on his sister and was

frankly trying to pierce her secrets. But Olive's beautiful eyes, so sweet and mischievous and melancholy in the shadow of dark lashes and deeply curving lids, kept their own counsel, and with a shrug of his shoulders the inquisitor gave her up.

"I'm not going to cross-examine you. It's your affair, not mine." Olive smiled, such scruples as a rule sat light on Julian: poor fox, what a pity the grapes were sour! "But I've had my suspicions for a long while, from Martin's manner, as well as from hints that Leigh and that ass Sladen have let drop, and when you swore off Laleham I felt pretty sure I was right. Of course, if you won't have him, it's not Martin's fault, poor devil: he can't do more than ask you: by Jove, I wouldn't ask any girl three times! But it does rile me that you shouldn't dare marry the fellow, if you want to, because his people think you aren't good enough! And I believe you do want to."

"Well, *mon ami*, I do, for Martin's sake, because I'm very fond of him and he's wretchedly unhappy. It has gone on so long, and I'm so fond of him, that I'd gladly give him his biscuit if I could, and it isn't Lord Laleham who would prevent me. For that matter, I could soon get round Lord Laleham if I liked: his prejudice is only a prejudice, and both he and Lady Laleham are so fond of Martin that they would soon grow fond of any woman who gave him biscuits. But I can't, so there's an end of it, and I do beg of you never to refer to it to Martin: he would dislike that intensely, and so should I. And you owe me some forbearance for being so frank with you, I never should have said half as much to anyone else. But you and I always understand each other,

don't we? I'm glad you're home. . . . I'll go and pack now."

"You shan't come if you would rather not. I'll drag Delphine straight back to-night——"

"No, old boy: I was only too glad to get her away for a time. I don't want her here."

"Why not? What is it now?"

"Merely that she has been seeing a little too much of young Wyatt. He is a nice fellow, and evidently can't help being attracted by her; but I don't suppose he's in earnest."

"Upon my word, Olive!"

"Well, what can one expect? Walter's sister!"

"Why did I go to Peru?" Julian groaned.

"To raise the family fortunes, which you've done like a Trojan. Dear, don't distress yourself! thanks to you, we shall soon be in a better position. Del will start clear before she's twenty."

"And you?"

"Oh, I?" said Olive, cursorily scornful. "I'm out of it. My young days are over! But I do want the pet lamb to enjoy herself, and I shall love to have her at Greys for a time. Everything will right itself then; if Tommy Wyatt comes, he'll come on a different footing, and the others, the set I never have liked, won't appear at all. It has been rather difficult lately, for Del is like a child of seven for innocence, and she calls me a Philistine because I won't let her go about London by herself or in Tommy's car. So don't fancy I shan't love to go to Greys, dear boy, and admire all your pretty things——"

She broke off as the door opened and Sladen strolled

in. His Indian mask was paler than usual and he was looking tired and jaded, but he greeted Julian with an amiable nod. "I saw your car outside and Salter champing the bit. What is little brother Julian doing in town? Is it a lady, or have you come up to be in at the death?"

Sure that Sladen's manner would irritate Julian, Olive intervened. "Did you see Del off? I hope you persuaded her not to get into a smoking carriage."

"Del? No, I didn't see her off after all," said Sladen carelessly. "I've been at the office——"

"*Mon Dieu!* Sladen, you never let her go to Waterloo by herself? That impossibly careless child? She'll lose all her luggage——"

"Be calm, my fair sister. She didn't go from Waterloo at all. I ran into Tommy in Hart Street while I was whistling for a cab——"

"Tommy Wyatt?"

"—in his new car, and he offered to motor her down instead. Her and all her boxes. To be candid, I'm not sure the proposal didn't originate with Delphine in the first instance, but he jumped at it and they went off in ecstasies. Love's young dream produced oblivion of his cushions and paint."

"Mr Wyatt offered to motor Delphine all the way down into Dorsetshire? He of all men—and you let him?"

Sladen, whose coolness had evidently been quite unaffected, looked up with a jerk from the cigarette he was lighting. "Why, what is there in that? You surely don't mind?"

"Not mind? My Delphine—and a casual man about town like young Wyatt?"

"But Wyatt's as straight as a die! Merciful heaven, my dear girl——"

"But heaven isn't always merciful." Olive was the most placable of all the Charnwoods, a byeword in her family for a serene good humour carried almost too far, as if life were not worth anger. But what bitter, what cynical irony there was now in her low voice, and in her dark eyes, fixed on Sladen, and darkened by the dilation of the pupils till they were blacker than his own! "Will you never learn wisdom? Oh! isn't once enough for any man to fail a woman?"

"I, fail—?" Apparently Sladen was neither abashed nor hurt, but simply bewildered; he seemed to be searching his memory for illumination, and he turned to Julian to help him, only to discover that Julian was rather more violently angry than his sister, though less alarmed. "Go and get your things on, Olive," said Julian curtly. "There's no harm done, they'll be down before we are." Then, as Olive, very pale now, left the room, "But that's no excuse for you, Sladen. You young ass! do you put your sister on the level of your other lady friends?"

Sladen returned to his cigarette. There were no lucifers in the box on the table, and he pulled out his own gold matchcase, a heavy, expensive trifle, engraved with a double diamond monogram, "S. C. from S. W.," and struck a match. In a draught from the open window its glow, sheltered by a perfectly steady hand, flickered and sank over features as inexpressive as if they had been carved out of flint. "Where did you

get that rotten little matchbox from?" asked Julian.

"From one of my lady friends," Sladen replied. "In effect, from Sally Witton of the Frolic. Would you care for an introduction?—Are you going to hit me or to preach to me? In the latter event I may as well sit down."

"Did you imagine that it's permissible for a young girl in our class to be out alone from morning till night with a fellow like Wyatt?"

"What's wrong with the unhappy Wyatt?"

"Nothing, so far as I know, except that he's a friend of yours. That's not the point: it's Delphine that we think of. Wyatt's not a relation. I don't doubt that he's a decent youngster. But girls of Delphine's age don't go about alone with men—not in our class."

"Our class?"

"My class. I don't know what your class is: you seem to have *un*classed yourself pretty completely. Where do you get your money from? I asked Leigh the other day, but he said he didn't know."

"This is, I suppose," Sladen remarked after a moment, "the Head of the Family who holds the floor."

"It is. I've been working these ten years past to get back to the position we've lost, and working pretty hard too, not for myself but for my sisters, and I don't propose to be handicapped. Either you come into line or you go adrift. Is that clear?"

"Adrift?"

"I can make allowance for Walter. He's no man's enemy but his own: and he never had any grip: I remember him as a boy. But you had brains and capacity, Sladen, and I find you living God knows how, mixing

with a crowd that I should like to kick downstairs, the riffraff of tenth-rate journalism and the sweepings of racing stables: low cads that in grandfather's day would have gone round to the back door! One Walter is enough in a family. I can stand him: but I won't stand you."

Sladen's wide sombre eyes were not even sullen. "Meaning that Greys is going to be your house and not mine?"

"Meaning precisely that, unless you pull up. I am not going to have it said that one of the Charnwoods drinks and the other——"

"—myself?——"

"Wins too much at cards," said Julian evenly.

He stood, one hand on his hip, coldly watching his brother. Sladen's eyes dropped: he sat absolutely still, like a figure in bronze, but slowly, and as if in defiance of a secret struggle, the blood surged up under his olive skin. Julian had no mercy. Many beats of the clock passed in this silent duel before it was broken by Salter's voice on the stairs, "What about the car, sir?" Julian turned away. If he had gone, then and there, it would have been a breach for ever. But he stopped at the door, and came back, and dropped his hand for a moment on his brother's shoulder— "You're young yet, Sladen," he said.

Twenty minutes later Olive appeared, still pale, but composed, and ineffaceably handsome in her serge suit and furred coat, necessary even on the thirty-first of July in a car of Julian's paces. "That child will have been blown away," she said, evidently anxious to return

to an every-day level. "She was in a gipsy hat and no veil. I hope Tommy's new car has a good wind screen."

"Wyatt is one of Leigh's lot, isn't he? A very decent young fellow." Julian waited to wind a rug round his sister's legs before settling himself at the wheel. "What on earth made you fire up like that?"

"Oh! a slip of the temper—or nerves: be charitable and forget it! There's no harm in Tommy, not an atom. I'm very sorry I was so unfair."

"What made you say that to Sladen about failing another woman?"

"Forget, forget," said Olive smiling. "Sladen was born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward, and I'm not going to rake up all his baby indiscretions; in that particular instance it wasn't even altogether his fault, and I expect he has forgotten it himself. Open her out when you can, will you? I really would rather Del wasn't alone all day with Denis and Tommy,—though Denis is such a sober young man that one might give him brevet rank as a chaperon."

Julian was always ready to "open her out," and never more so than now, for his temper had been ruffled by the scene with Sladen and he was longing to get away from it. An odious little scene: one of those incidents that stick in a man's memory like a thorn, and prick him at intervals, to his life's end, in a tender spot of discomfort and shame. Family affection ran strong in all the Charnwoods, and although Julian was not consciously fond of Sladen, whose manners set his teeth on edge, they were brothers after all, and the recollection of Sladen's damning blush made his own face smart.

Olive too was troubled about Sladen. She had long

feared that one day he would feel the weight of Julian's hand, a heavy hand; and now perhaps her own injustice had brought it on him. She longed to ask what had happened after she left the room, but dared not, for the men must fight their own battles, and her pleading, any woman's pleading, would only harden Julian: "you spoil the boy," he would cry: and for that matter her own *laissez-faire* policy was not, in Sladen's case, justified by its results. He was the only one of her brothers whom she could not understand. He was goodnatured—indeed, if his manners had been more agreeable, one might have called him unselfish; only Olive knew how much she depended on him for messages and errands and small tiring jobs about the house; and yet she never thought of him without a pang.

"My lord, I will use them according to their desert."

"God's bodykins, man, better! use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping?"

Whatever Sladen's desert, Olive hoped that Julian, for whom all character was painted in black or white, had not used him after it. She suspected Sladen of an occasional sensitiveness.

CHAPTER XIII

In and out of the traffic the low car slipped like a snake, fidgetting over tramlines from Hammersmith to Kew and feeling her way down the narrow streets of Brentford, till at length she left suburban entanglements behind her and came out on the Basingstoke road. Then Julian touched his accelerator and they began to fly through the summer-weary countryside, where the oak trees of Hampshire stood drooping under the weight of their dark July foliage, while over wide stretches of tilth, or on low slopes and crests of upland, sainfoin in crimson and clover in mauve patches alternated with yellow stripes of mustard and the showery, silvery green of young oats.

From Basingstoke to Salisbury they made good running, but when they got into Dorsetshire the roads grew narrow and twisty, and a few miles out of Shaftesbury, just as Julian was congratulating himself on the pace they had made from town, they had a bad puncture and he was obliged to pull up and fit a spare tyre. This was the beginning of one of those catastrophic runs of ill luck that fell now and again, ten or fifteen years ago, on every man who owned a car. Near Sherborne Julian ran short of petrol, was directed to a garage in a lane, found himself among unlaid flints, and ripped open a second tyre. When they limped into the garage, which bore a close resemblance to an ordinary village forge, they found that all hands had gone off to a cricket match except an individual of tender years, impenetrably stupid

and immovably slow. They filled up at last, but between Sherborne and Yeovil Julian had engine trouble and lay for some time on his back in the road, while Olive sat in a plantation of rosebay-willowherb and turned a judiciously deaf ear to the murmurs that floated out to her. At length Julian rose up, oil and dust from head to foot, but triumphant—and then the lamps refused to light. It was by now quite dark, and even Julian did not care to take the road without them; and he and Olive spent fully twenty minutes peering into the reflectors by the dreary gleam of a fag-end of candle before the great acetylines would open their silver eyes. Nine miles out of Laleham they passed another car, stranded at the roadside and evidently in distress; but Julian flew by callously, and even Olive, though she had all the instincts of a Good Samaritan, conquered her tender heart for once and turned her head the other way.

It was after seven o'clock when they drew up at the door of Greys, and almost every window was dark. Olive sprang out, glad to stretch her cramped limbs, and hurried into the house—for events which are not at all amusing at the time become purely humorous when retailed across a warm supper-table to a shuddering audience: the wind had blown all her forebodings out of her head, and she looked eagerly towards the stairs, expecting Delphine to fly down them in the blue Japanese dressing gown and butterfly sash which the young lady seized every chance of wearing in public. But no Delphine appeared, only Denis, who came out of the billiard room with a Bradshaw in his hand and a face full of joy and relief. "Oh Olive! how jolly to see you! Is Julian there too? and Delphine?"

"*Delphine?*"

Olive stood motionless, the light of a shaded lamp thrown full over her tall figure in its close-fitting fur coat, her pale features, and the black hair still satin-smooth under her close French cap and veil.

"Is not Delphine here?"

"No— Oh Olive, what is it? Did you expect to find her?"

"Julian, Delphine is not here."

Julian came, tired and dirty, into the golden radius of lamplight. "Not here? Why, what on earth can have become of her? Didn't she send a wire? Good heavens, Olive, don't stand looking like Lot's wife! There's sure to be nothing in it——"

"But there hasn't been a line from anyone all day!" said Denis. "I drove into Countisford to meet the 1.15, but she wasn't there, so then I came back here and waited, but nothing came for anyone in the way of a wire or a card, so I drove over again for the 4.31, and after that I sent a wire to Bloomsbury, but I haven't had any reply. Didn't she come by the Waterloo train?"

"No," said Julian rather curtly. "If you must know, she took French leave and started off to motor down here with young Wyatt, but I suppose they got hung up somewhere. We've been hung up about twelve times over ourselves." He glanced uneasily at Olive. "Tommy's a careful driver. But he ought not to keep the child out so late: why, it can't have been much after nine o'clock when they left Bloomsbury! What the devil can they have been up to?"

"Would they come the same road you did?"

"My good chap, how should I know?—Oh well, come

to think of it, they would, because it was Wyatt who mapped out this route for me the first time I drove down here; there was some crab or other in the Dorchester road, I forget what." Julian took his cap off to scratch his head. "Confound that brat, what a nuisance she is! I suppose I shall have to go back and see if I can pick up their trail. I'm dog-tired too, and if that infernal car goes on behaving as she's done to-night—Caramba! Littledale, bring me a whiskey and soda—stiff. What about you, Olive—you won't come too?"

"No, thanks: I'll wait here and see what happens. Ten to one it's only a bad breakdown, in which case they may turn up at any minute. Won't you have some supper before you go?"

"No, but you might have some ready against I get back!" Julian's brow cleared, it was a relief to him to hear Olive answer in such a tranquil and cheerful tone: he was anxious himself, but with a man's cool, easy-going anxiety, which has no heat of imagination behind it. "I shall go to Yeovil and knock up the police station there, and then on to Sherborne. If I can't hear anything of them by that time I shall come home, and probably find them here before me. No use racketing all over Dorsetshire in the middle of the night. I wish Delphine weren't a girl. What she wants is a jolly good hiding."

Having delivered himself of this relief to his feelings Julian set down his empty tumbler, dragged on his gloves again, and vanished into the night. A moment later they heard the loud throbbing whirr of the engine, and etched in light under an arch of trees the car's long and low silhouette sprang out clear, a ruby glow at her heels, while far ahead the fanbeams of her hooded lamps shone

in a broad glittering lane over every bleached pebble underfoot, every silvered grass-blade, every July branch frosted by their wintry fire.

"Don't you think, perhaps, Littledale, Miss Charnwood might like a cup of tea, please?"

Strange to say, Littledale liked Denis. He lent a deferential ear to this extremely timid request, and went away with a grave "Yessir. In the drawingroom, sir," as if Denis were a little boy and Littledale were his nurse. And Denis dutifully opened the door of the drawingroom —the wide, shady, flowery room which was to have been part of Julian's "surprise", with its pale chintzes and Cavalier portraits. "Do come in and sit down, you must be so tired." Poor Olive was in no mood for admiring Spanish carpets to-night! She was very tired, as tired as Julian, for Leigh had been flying a new model at Hendon lately, and she had been up every morning between three and four o'clock to send him off with a hot breakfast: but she could not rest. Rest, while her darling was in danger!

Olive was not fanciful. She had remained serene, not even turning pale, in the Grand Stand at Hendon while Leigh spun through the dizzy evolutions of the Falling Leaf. But Delphine was not Leigh: for Delphine she was always faintly nervous: and now there was real danger and even Denis was grave. From nine in the morning till nearly twelve o'clock at night——!

"Oh, how hot it is in here!" Olive murmured. "Do open the windows wider, Denis!" He obeyed, letting in the manifold soft odours and sounds of a summer night. The Greys drawingroom faced south, and its French windows opened on a deep piazza, now in shade; for the

moon was still on the other side of the house, and the shadow of peaked roof and jutting dormer melted imperceptibly into the shadow of trees on terrace and lawn. And round this old room, long consecrated to gentle uses, there clung an impalpable air interwoven of sound and scent—the honied scent of roses standing about in china jars, the ghosts of old and polite conversation, the echo of small nocturnal doings in wood and field: as if Greys were an inseparable part of its forest and meadow surroundings, and they of it. Everyone knows country houses that have this intimate association with their soil and their history, a delicate air which almost always perishes when they change hands. Greys had changed hands of late, but into and not away from its original ownership, and it seemed to draw its breath more sweetly under Julian's loving care. But Olive was in a keener fever than even Greys could soothe. She sat still, leaning her cheek on her hand, and looking out across a wide fall of countryside chequered in light and shade to the pale towers of Laleham.

A human tone in the hush of night, there came the high siren-wail of Julian's car as he swung round a turn into the village: then silence again, and the distant faint murmur of the stream pouring over shallows in the woods between them and Laleham. Littledale brought in a tray. "You will have some tea, won't you?" said Denis, "because I can't if you don't, and I do want some. Cream and no sugar, isn't it? and you like your milk in first."

"Thank you, Denis: kind Denis! Oh yes, and I'll have some sandwiches too: I only wish I had made Julian put a few in his pocket. We haven't had anything to

eat since a late tea in Salisbury, which is foolish, and tends to make one feel more anxious than is necessary." She tried to smile at Denis. "Are you thinking me very fanciful? I try not to be. But it is alarming, isn't it?"

"Of course it's alarming—anyone would feel alarmed. If it was an ordinary mishap and Wyatt just didn't bother to wire, he ought to be skinned alive!" said Denis wrathfully. "All the same, depend on it, that's all it is. Wyatt's not much more than a boy, is he? One of those careless chaps: and Delphine, well, Delphine would never think of doing it if he didn't, she's such a child——"

Olive gave an involuntary start and set down her cup untasted. "Oh don't say that—and yet it's true."

"What's true?"

"She is a child. Too childish. She has been too much petted, too much guarded. I was a coward. But she was so sweet, I couldn't bear to brush the bloom off."

"Julian always will have China tea," was Denis's not very relevant reply. "I've come to rather like the flavour. It's refreshing, isn't it? especially if you drink it while it's hot."

"Oh, you said that just like Martin," Olive murmured. She drank her tea resignedly.

"After all it might be worse, mightn't it? if it weren't Wyatt, I mean. He'll take all the care he can of her, and in case they have to go to an hotel to sleep he's sure to have plenty of money, she's quite safe with him."

"Are women ever safe with men?"

"Oh, Olive!"

"Have I hurt you? Dreamers that men are! so loth to see truth in its real colours! even now on the brink of war, when the foundations are breaking up under our

feet, you'll go on believing in the safety of civilisation and the sanctity of human life! It is an illusion, a gloss: there's no safety, no more for the individual than for the nation: tempted men are not saints, nor women either for that matter, and you know very well that thousands of young girls, flowerbuds like Delphine, have perished in some sudden storm——"

"But Delphine is not a temptation."

"Is pure innocence not a temptation?—oh, how hot it is to-night!"

She leant her forehead on her hand again and sat still, covering her eyes.

Denis was saddened—not convinced, indeed not even remotely influenced, but distressed for Olive's sake: what bitter, what devastating experiences, he said to himself in his private dialect of words of one syllable, must have come into her life to make her talk in this wild way! At the application of such a dark philosophy to poor young Wyatt, *bon enfant* if ever there was one, he could only smile: but what a strange creed it was to spring from Olive's beautiful and serene lips! From her lips? No: hers was no mere lip-service to the dark powers. So calm as she was too, as a rule!

He sat down on the edge of the table beside her chair. "Dear Olive, I'm sure she really is safe with Wyatt, he never would run off with her, no man would, at least no gentleman: I'm not clever like Julian, but I *am* a man, and you can take it from me that men don't do things like that. Slip out of your coat, you wouldn't feel it so hot if you hadn't that great heavy jacket on." With fingers almost as deft as Sladen's he coaxed her, loosening her coat and easing her shoulder out of her sleeve.

"So: and now let me untie your veil, may I? and take your hat off before it makes your head ache: as if your hair weren't thick enough without a hat on as well! . . . In Mollendo once there was a girl out there in a café that I would have given anything to be her lover; but we found out that she wouldn't want to have had lovers if the manageress hadn't made her; so Julian and I and one or two other fellows had a whip round and got her out of it and sent her home. There, don't look so unhappy!" With perfect simplicity he put his arm round her to comfort her, and Olive, who for ten years had stood like a solitary pine tree bare to all the winds of life, giving shelter but receiving none, turned towards him as naturally as if it had been Martin instead of Martin's brother, and leant her head against the quiet strength of his breast. Denis smiled at her tenderly and stroked her hair. His heart was not beating one pulse the faster for her proximity. Although he had never seen her with Martin, he had watched Martin and listened to Sladen, and he thought of her as his sister; as the woman whom Martin loved, and who loved Martin, and would in the end become his wife: and smiling he let his fancy play over them, taking a freedom in his dreams which would have made Olive blush and perhaps Martin too, for secure in his impersonality Denis was a natural realist.

"And Maggie wasn't even a good girl, not by that time, poor thing: whereas Delphine—! Imagine if it were Leigh or Julian, or Martin, or even me! I'd rather die than hurt a young thing like Del: and I'd answer for Wyatt as I would for myself. . . ."

It was no doubt the same Imp of the Perverse who had

presided all day long over the affairs of the Charnwood family, that sent Martin Laleham out that evening to smoke a late cigarette in the woods of Laleham Chase. Troubled by the ominous political sky, which had a most unwelcome aspect for an ex-Guardsman of pacific temper, he felt sleep far from him, and instead of going to bed he strolled down for a breath of air, along garden walks that smelt of blown roses and early lavender, through the clear dimness of a beech grove, to the brink of the Fleet.

Across it and a long rise of woody meadow Greys lifted up its peaked roof, black under a low moon warmly golden. Its porch and upper storeys were dark, but deep set under their dim arcade the windows that Denis had opened shone in a long stripe of orange-coloured light. The household had not all gone to bed then, perhaps Philip Smith was there, or Leigh or Sladen with late news from town. There was no bridge over the Fleet at this point, but a fallen branch was bridge enough for Martin, and brushing through a hedge he came up over the silken meadow-grass, bare-headed and in his evening clothes. He had not seen Julian for a day or two, and had no idea that Olive was already at Greys.

His thin pumps made no sound on the turf, and scarcely any on the brick floor of the verandah. From a distance he recognised Denis, sitting on the edge of the table, but it was not till he was close to the window that he saw there was a woman behind him, and even then he could not see her face. He was startled and offended. What was a woman doing in Greys at midnight? But as he turned to go, reddening in the vexation of an un-

intentional spy, Denis moved, and he recognised Olive.

Then instead of the familiar ache of unsatisfied desire Martin was seized by a violence of pain which affected him physically like a blow over the heart: and disabled, almost fainting under the form of mental suffering which is most intimately connected with the nervous system, he leant against a pillar helplessly watching Denis and Olive, whose movements were as clear in dumb show as any cinema love-scene. Martin had never touched those rook's-wing braids of hair, though he had written sonnets on them—sonnets that found a congenial home in the flames: but Hay, it seemed, was allowed privileges which he had never enjoyed. And what a strange smile there was on Hay's lips: and in Olive's eyes what languor, what unguarded sweetness!

Midnight, and solitude, and the house sleeping all round them. . . .

It was not till Olive's voice reached him, clear in the hush of night, that Martin recovered energy enough to escape. "Denis, if you and I . . ." Heavens, he was eavesdropping!

"Denis, if you and I weren't friends, I should fall in love— Oh! what is that?"

"What?"

"A step on the terrace. See who is there."

He went to the window, but the verandah was deserted: dark arcade, and dusky floor, and grey turf part in shade and part in moon, ranging through every gradation of dimness from basalt to silver, all was empty and silent, and Denis sorrowfully shook his head. "Delphine wouldn't come that way, or so quietly."

"I never thought it was Delphine," said Olive. "It was not like her step."

And after all it was a night of much ado about nothing. We all know very well that these hours of anxious waiting are sure to end in an "Oh, *there* you are!" We all resolve after every such waste of anxiety that next time we will be more economical of it; and when next time comes we all think that this time there can be no explanation—there really must be something wrong. But accidents are few, and, when they come, they almost invariably come without warning. The cuckoo clock in the hall had scarcely done chiming twelve when Julian's horn was heard far down the road, and two minutes later the car throbbed itself to a standstill and out of it tumbled Julian, infuriated: Mr Wyatt, hangdog: and Delphine dimpling and unabashed. She was not apologetic, not she: Delphine had long learnt that the only way to forestall a scolding is to develop a grievance, and she stood in the middle of the drawingroom reproachful as Philomela, but far from dumb.

"You passed us, oh, you passed us, and you *wouldn't* stop," she wailed. "I *said* it was Julian's car, but Tommy said he was *sure* if it had been *Julian* he *would* have stopped——"

"Passed you where? Who passed you?"

"You and Julian, coming down from town. You saw the brown car sitting under a signpost in the middle of a four-cross-roads? Well, that was us!" Delphine explained. "We've been sitting there, on and off, ever since eight o'clock! We had lunch in Basingstoke and tea in Amesbury——"

"Amesbury! what were you doing in Amesbury?"

"Why, seeing Stonehenge, of course! I've never seen it, and Tommy said it was only a mile or two out of the way——"

"Oh, I say!"

"—or thereabouts, so we planned to get down here in nice time for half-past-eight dinner, and then Tommy went and dropped his carburettor——"

"Del, I told you——"

"Well, accelerator or whatever you call it—when we were five miles from anywhere, and he had to walk into the nearest village and borrow a bicycle and ride I don't know how far, and we're very tired and very dirty and very hungry, and we think you're perfect *pigs*—so! When you flew by and wouldn't look at us I could have cried with rage. Ohé! Tommy, have a peach?" She offered the dish to Mr Wyatt: she had already eaten two herself. But seven and twenty is a more discreet age than seventeen, and Tommy passed her by.

"Miss Charnwood, I'm heartily sorry," he said. "I'm afraid you've been horribly anxious. I don't know how I could have helped it, but I'm sure I ought to have, somehow! We did send a wire, but I'm afraid, between us, we made a muddle of the address. And we ought not to have dawdled so long at Stonehenge—" he paused: Delphine scowled at him: no one doubted who it was who had dawdled at Stonehenge. But Tommy was too generous to incriminate his mistress, and hurried on, "Did you think we had had a spill? I couldn't send Del on by train because there is none at the Halt after seven, and I didn't care to let her fetch up at Countisford by herself. And the only conveyance in the place was a

butcher's car, which she didn't like the look of. But I *am* sorry to have given you such a scare!"

"Pooh! Olive's not so easily frightened," said Delphine with scorn.

"I was very anxious, Del," said Olive quietly.

Delphine opened her large brown eyes in unaffected wonder. "But we couldn't both have been killed!" she pointed out. "Or did you think Tommy had run off with me?"

It was hard to believe that her serene and blooming naughtiness sprang of the same generation as Olive's white fatigue. "Oh, go and get your supper and go to bed!" said Julian impatiently. "Come and wash, Tommy. Bring us up some champagne, will you, Littledale?—What?—No, my lady, not a teaspoonful. Milk's your ticket. I'll bet it was all your fault from start to finish, you wretched little monkey you. What you want is a jolly hiding!"

CHAPTER XIV

And so Julian's famous "surprise" turned out no better than "surprises" usually do, and the preparations on which he had worked so hard were all thrown away, for the only person who appreciated them was Delphine, whom they were not designed to please. Julian was not in sympathy with the family attitude towards Delphine. He said she was as spoilt as a Pekinese puppy: and there were moments—melancholy moments—when Olive agreed with him.

Julian had gone to some trouble to give Olive and Delphine communicating rooms, as in Bloomsbury Square, but when Olive followed her young sister up to bed she found the inner door shut and locked, for the first time since Delphine's babyhood. Was it guilty terror that had turned the key? Olive listened for the sound of tears inside, but none came, the fact being that Delphine had gone to sleep. Olive was not sleepy. She had not succeeded in getting any very clear account of the day's adventures from either Delphine or her cavalier, and she foresaw that she would have to scold Delphine—a process which she dreaded far more than Delphine did. The young lady knew she was in for a scolding—hence the locked door: but what's the odds to a Pekinese puppy, so much too pretty to be whipped?

In truth Delphine was not at all of a romantical disposition, and would have been equally amused and annoyed if she had known that Olive believed her to be lying awake in tears. Tears? what in the world was

there for her to cry over? She had had a pleasant day —a very pleasant day: she was looking forward to a pleasant day to-morrow—since Mr Wyatt was staying the night: and the prospect of being slapped by Julian or lectured by Olive weighed on her just as much (and no more) as the disapproval of his form master troubles the peace of Harrison minor. She curled up luxuriously in her embroidered sheets and fell asleep smiling.

But Olive stood long by her window, watching the moon go slowly up the sky, in and out of pale clouds faintly gilded, and star after star, mere needle-points of remote silver, sink down over the sea-girt Dorsetshire hills. What were her thoughts? In Bloomsbury Miss Charnwood had little time to think: she lived in and for her family: she was one of those rare ascetics who regard pleasure as necessary for others but not for themselves, and if, now and again, the spirit of her youth rose in mutiny, she took it out in washing dishes or cleaning silver, sovran anodynes for a restless heart. But to-night her mood was so sad that her courage well-nigh failed her.

She looked back over her own life with a bitter impersonal pity, as if it had been that of another woman. Delphine was slipping away from her. Julian, fond as he was of her, would not want her with him when he was married to Sophy Laleham. Her influence had not saved Walter. Sladen, the secret and solitary, had never unbosomed himself to her, and his manners were so casual that though she counted on his services she could not count on his affection—even if there had been no doubt about Sladen, no secret ache of fear.

Saints preach the beauty of living for others, and fail

to warn us of the locust years to come, when those for whom we have sacrificed ourselves pass on to activities that we cannot share, and leave our hands empty. Then the dreamer, disillusioned, is prone to ask if a life of kindly temperate selfishness is not wisest after all, as nearest to harmony with the mind of nature, who tolerates no altruism under her flag. "Why didn't I seize happiness when it came my way?" Olive murmured. "I've sacrificed everything to a scruple: and who is the better for it? Or if I had taken my joy under the rose who would have been the worse? Martin? What harm would it have done him so long as he never knew? I'm not so weak that I couldn't have hidden it from him: and surely if ever a woman had a right to keep her secret it's I. And I could have made him so happy! But now if this war comes I shall lose him." Hard paradox! to lose what one has never had.

By nature Olive was no stoic. Frugality, industry, patience—she had all the drab virtues, but they were all acquired! Though none of her brothers knew it except perhaps Sladen, she had in her a strong bent for luxury and a love of beauty that was even dangerously keen. It had been kept well down in Bloomsbury, but directly she reached Greys it revived under the influence of moonlight and fatigue and the roses and champagne of Julian's supper-table. She had forgotten what it was like to eat a meal (and such a meal!) which she had not cooked, from plates which she would not have to wash up: and to find her clothes unpacked and her nightdress laid out by a maid who murmured "Shan't I brush your hair for you, m'm, like I did for the other young lady?"

How different too were these surroundings from her

big bare room at home! On the frame of her lattice window the moon shone blue, and the sprigs of white jasmine that waved in at it were all stained by that unearthly light. There were curtains of old and fine chintz with small roses on them and truelovers' knots. Her dressing table and the four tall spiral posts of her bed had the glow and bloom of old Spanish mahogany that has never known varnish,[1] her quilt was a bit of silken French embroidery, and her rose-shaded candles threw their mild illumination deep into the recesses of a tall panel mirror which might have remembered the beauties of Versailles.

This mirror drew Olive like a magnet. Undressing slowly by the open window, she resisted it, but on her way to bed she found herself crossing in front of it, and she stood still, lured by the reflection of her own beauty; there was little light in her room, and less in the reflected room where a pallid blue ray of the moon warred with the rose-colour of candleshine; and it was like an interior in an old fairytale, there was magic in its dimness and an innocence of unreality, and like a princess in a fairytale Olive's tall slenderness gleamed in it, imperfectly veiled, her ribbon loosened for coolness, her arms and shoulders bare.

Oh beauty mysterious and significant, house of life to receive and shelter life! and she had a poet for a lover—a man who would have known how to extract the quintessence of love's delight without dispelling its magic and its poetry of association. "If ever a child of mine succeeds to Laleham you will be its mother." Olive smiled, relish-

[1] Not even from the insidious and destructive fingers of the French-polisher.

ing the sharp cynic tang of Martin's candour: a thing that Julian in his English prudery would never have said to Sophy Laleham! no, nor Denis, nor perhaps any other man she knew. And yet it came to that in the long run: it was through Martin's eyes that she admired her own beauty: she set little value on it except as a jewel that other men might envy him for wearing . . . and trembling she realised that the true Olive Charnwood was not the workaday Olive of London, but this girl in the enchanted mirror, this tall Princess Fair-Star with her dark sparkling eyes, who would so gladly have given the odd thirty or forty years of her life for one world-without-end hour in Martin's arms, for a night—this night . . .

She swung round and walked away. What! wasn't it even yet whipped to heel, this spirit of reckless passion that she had fought against so hard in the first years of her love for Martin? Standing at the open window she wrapped herself again in her sombre courage. It was by now very late, or very early: the moon was near the western hilltops, an inkling of daylight was feeling its way among clouds densely folded: lawn and field and tree were neutral-coloured in grey and brown, and from the tumbling Channel not far off there breathed a chilly wind of dawn. Rising from its woods, she could just make out the towers of Laleham Chase, where Martin slept. To-morrow at any turn, in the fields, in the village, she might meet him. But the Olive who met him must be the Olive of London and not of the enchanted mirror.

"You are not happy," she said to herself, "and pray have you any right to be happy? Oh fool, will there be so much happiness going in the world this coming year or

so? There—feel the wind on your breast: would you rather it were Martin's lips? Well, it is not, it never will be: you will never marry him: most likely you'll watch him marry another woman—yes, and you may think yourself lucky if that happens to you! Luckier than thousands upon thousands of women who will watch their lovers die. Or perhaps that will be your lot: If it is, I'll give you leave to call yourself unhappy then, when you hear that he's dying and you have to remember that he belongs to his father and mother and not to you. Wait till that happens before you cry out! But, even if it does, you may grieve but you shan't regret. What was true three years ago is true still: if he knew the truth he wouldn't want to marry you, and better give him up for ever than deceive him. . . . After all, if war comes and he has to fight—my darling, my darling! at least you'll forget me."

War or no war, Delphine's case was urgent. On the following morning she disappeared with Mr Wyatt directly after breakfast, and when it transpired, at lunch, that they had spent the forenoon catching sticklebacks in the Fleet, Olive felt that now or never was the time for a little lecture. But Delphine saw it coming and did not take kindly to it. Sent to her room to put herself tidy, Olive found her sitting on her bed without any dress on as if she were waiting to be whipped—but she wasn't. Altogether charming and altogether impenitent, she had seized the occasion to undo her plaits, and she began combing them vigorously while Olive pointed out to her that young ladies of seventeen really cannot be allowed to run about bare-legged like gipsies.

"'Wasn't bare-legged," averred Delphine, immersing herself in a mantle of curls out of which a ray of the sun evoked prismatic brilliancies: "not much above my knee, that is. Tommy was barer."

"The pair of you—and that stream runs through the Laleham grounds! No, Del, I'm serious: you're not at Saint Tropez now. In a straitlaced English village people don't do these things. I wonder at Tommy for taking you."

"'Didn't take me," was the uncompromising reply. "I took him. I said 'Let's *filer* before Olive sees us,' and we did."

"And suppose Philip Smith had seen you, or Mr Laleham?"

"*I* call him Martin."

It was at this point that Olive began to think wistfully of Julian's favourite prescription. "Delphine, you ought to be shaken! Why are you so naughty? It's time you left off these baby ways. No, it's no use curling your hair at me, I'm not Tommy Wyatt——"

"Certainly not," Delphine opened round shocked eyes, "it would be *most* improper if you were!"

Olive had never initiated Delphine into the mysteries of life. Like most mothers, she had often watched the beloved, childish head, and wondered whether speculations were already going on behind that seemingly candid brow, or if it would be safe to leave her a little longer in her innocence. But she was seventeen now, on the brink of womanhood; and reluctantly Olive reminded herself that after six months in Brandon's studio she could hardly be so unaware as she seemed to her elder sister. One must warn these young things: though it was like

brushing the bloom from a butterfly's wings. Diffidently Olive put a question—but the smile that it brought to Delphine's lips was past her interpretation.

"O no I don't, not a bit. Josephine Frewen always used to say I was very innocent. Perhaps that's why I'm naughty?"

"Yes, dear, it is." This reply was unforeseen, and Delphine for the first time ruffled a feather or two. "Too innocent to foresee what is likely to happen when girls of your age behave as you've been behaving with your young friend. Tommy is a thorough little gentleman and we're all very fond of him, but it's never wise to put oneself in a false position. You wouldn't like him, would you, to speak of you as Sladen speaks of Josephine?"

"*Olive!*—He wouldn't."

"He will if you run after him as Josephine runs after Sladen. You're not like Josephine. She is a reckless little creature and you had better hear now why I've never let you make a close companion of her." It was soon done, though it cost Olive a cruel effort: the more painful because Delphine remained impenetrable in her shower of curls. "I'm sorry for her, but she must pay her price, and part of it is separation from the friendship of young girls. Tommy isn't likely to mistake you for a second Josephine, but he might for such another little Bohemian as she was, I dare say, five years ago. You wouldn't like it if he were to kiss you." Delphine preserved a rosy and smiling silence. "Oh Del, you haven't let him?"

"Only once or twice on Sundays."

"But, my darling!——"

"Oh bother!" cried Delphine. She was not abashed, not she—it took a great deal to ruffle Delphine's sunny temper: the distress and confusion were all on Olive's part. "You can't talk, Olive, look at you and Denis! it wasn't any properer for you to be alone with him last night than for me to be with poor old Tommy this morning, only whenever you want to do anything improper you pretend it doesn't signify because you're so old, but you're not so *very* old and you're quite nice-looking still!" Nothing like carrying the war into the enemy's country. "Why shouldn't I let Tommy kiss me once in a way? He liked it and so do I. And *of course* I'm going to marry him by and by—so what's the odds?"

"Going to— But you're not engaged to him?"

"No, not engaged. I'd have told you if I were. You mustn't fancy I'm not fond of you," gently replied the incalculable quantity. "He hasn't even asked me yet. He hasn't *dared*. But he will as soon as I let him. I shall refuse him—twice, I think—because I really don't want to get married for a year or two, and besides it would be so slow to accept the first man the first time; but I shall do it tactfully so as not to hurt his feelings, and of *course* he knows I shall accept him in the end."

"And suppose he never gave you a second chance? Men have their pride."

"Oh, pooh!—Girls manage better now than they did when you were young."

Miss Charnwood was eight and twenty. She was accustomed to regard herself as old enough to be Delphine's mother, and yet, and yet——!

"If you would only believe it, we quite understand each other. You see," Delphine was happy to expatiate

on her own interesting situation, "you belong to a generation that took Life seriously, and it doesn't pay, it never did. All that," she waved her hand, with the brush in it, "is so terribly *vieux jeu*. Of course I know Josephine has l-lovers. She has a perfect right to express herself in that way because she has a p-passionate temperament. I haven't, so I shan't. If Tommy and I were madly in love with each other like Victorians in a novel it might be different, but we're not, very few people are now (Josephine's rather a survival); we're simply going to get married on a euge—eug'nic basis, so there's nothing to be proud about and if Tommy didn't ask me *I* should ask *him*. It'll be great fun being engaged: perhaps not quite so jolly when we're married, not if we have children that is, but I'm not sure I shall let Tommy have any children, or not more than one, perhaps, just one little one I shouldn't mind, I like babies when they're clean. I dare say you don't know anything about it, girls didn't when you were young, but there are ways that you can be married and not have any at all. Dear me, you look quite shocked! You *are* old-fashioned—I suppose you think I ought never to have heard of having babies!"

"Hadn't you better begin by ascertaining Tommy's views? *C'est son affaire à lui.*"

"I did ask him once in an indirect and delicate manner. But he said nineteen; so I guess that doesn't count. But he quite agrees that it's a mistake to rush into marriage in the old-fashioned haphazard way. He says when he marries (me, that is), he's going to be thoroughly practical and sensible and unromantic, because it's really much better fun. Why don't *you* try being practical, old Olive? I don't believe you've ever had much fun."

"No: but I'm not so clever as you are," said Olive, repressing a great desire to tweak Delphine's curls.

Every breath of wind had been taken out of her sails, and this surprising experience left her a little inclined to laugh and a little inclined to cry. How very flat her sermon had fallen! What an absurd child it was, and what a mixture of naïveté and sophistication, modestly tripping over Josephine's l-lovers! and yet there was no denying that she had made the princess of the magic mirror feel like a prim old maid. Why indeed was not Olive a light-come-light-go philosopher like Delphine, filling her hands with these airy affections that cost neither blood nor tears? In the feelings that Delphine inspired in her mind it would be hard to say whether a wistful ungrudging envy predominated, or a deep impatient scorn. Were they as shallow as they seemed, those clear and smiling eyes?

"So you have it all mapped out," she said with the cool irony of which Delphine was secretly a little afraid. "But still you must be careful, for if you're so practical you mustn't complain if other people are practical too. You have no money, my dear, and nothing to boast of in the way of a family. Are you so sure that old Mr and Mrs Wyatt will welcome you for a daughter-in-law? If Mr Wyatt were to put his foot down it would be very awkward for Tommy. He might elect to look out for another bride, equally eugenic and a little better off."

"What—and throw me over?"

"Shabby, wouldn't it be? but surely the most practical thing to do, if he found himself in danger of being cut off with a shilling. Your Tommy is no hero——"

"He is, he is a hero!" Delphine cried, getting up and

shaking back her hair, "at least not exactly a hero, but he isn't shabby and he never would throw a girl over—never! You don't understand men, you think you do but you don't, not one bit. Shabby indeed!"

"But since you're marrying on an eugenic basis——"

"O fiddlesticks! You have no heart, none at all." Delphine was by now whirling herself into hairpins and her dress, but the storm was by no means over, though the lightnings were a shade less vivid. "I call it simply snobbish to think so much about family. And you *are* a snob, else why wouldn't you marry poor old Martin? I'm sure he doesn't care a button about family any more than Tommy or I do. But *I'm* not going to break people's hearts in your high and mighty way. I don't care a pin about being rehab—rehabitilated in society, if people don't like me they can leave me, but Tommy does, and so do I, and for two pins I'd marry him to-morrow, that I would! Shabby indeed! Once for all, Olive, I'm grown up now, and you're *not* my mother, and I—I *won't* go to church any more!"

Climax, at which Olive had much ado not to laugh. It had its sting, of course, as the unconscious egoism of the young always has for the elder generation; but any smart that Olive felt was balmed by her immense thankfulness and love. It had not taken long to pierce Delphine's armour! Olive thought the little scene would be a lesson to her all her life. Never again would she mistrust the sweet, generous, natural feeling that lies hidden under twentieth century sophistication as pure as ever it lay under Victorian primness. Her one regret was that she didn't dare take the indignant Delphine in her arms and kiss her on the spot.

And Delphine? Apart from a dim suspicion of having given herself away, Delphine too had nothing to regret. Some such *éclaircissement* had long been impending. Olive must be taught that a young lady who can be engaged as soon as she likes is not to be put in the corner. On the whole she was glad to have got it over: and all in a few minutes too! But having said her say and won the day she was too magnanimous to sulk, and though she swept downstairs in all the dignity of a quarrel she was only keeping up appearances. No grudge rankled long in Delphine's memory, not even that unfortunate allusion to Mr Wyatt's hypothetical shabbiness. "As if my darling Tommy *ever* would——!"

CHAPTER XV

"This time next year," said Leslie Wright, "I'd give tuppence to know what we shall all be doing."

Between the high terrace of Greys and the low fields washed by the river, there stretched the slope of a wide irregular lawn; and on it, at nine o'clock of the same evening, the Charnwood household were gathered together. The evening of the first of August, warm after a warm, veiled, mother-o'-pearl day: through the perfumed twilight moths sailed on velvet wing, and there was scarcely a sound to be heard but the shrill *zit zit* of bats

> that seem to follow in the air
> Some grand circumference of a shadowy dome
> To which we are blind.

Not a breath of wind stirred and no dews were falling. Greys lay dark, turning its back on the moon. The west was still coloured by the dead sunset, and on its light the chain of coastal hills, cape and promontory, misty and unillumined, linked by dark rims of sea, hung like a shadow or a stain. In the middle distance, distinct out of dark masses of wood, loomed the fawn-coloured towers of Laleham Chase.

The lawn itself was a great leaf-shaped expanse of turf dropping down between cedar trees to a mossy ha-ha overgrown with rose-briars: its woody borders ran to no great depth, but the way the grass wound in among the trees, and the trees came marching out on the grass, gave it an air of mystery, the eye losing itself in cliffs and caves

of shadow. Greys the house had no ghost, but Frank Charnwood vowed that the Cedar Lawn was haunted after sunset: there was always a faun, he said, footing it in one of those glades that you couldn't see the end of. . . .

The party on the lawn to-night were not sensitive to ghosts. They consisted of Julian Charnwood, Olive, Delphine, and Denis Hay: Mr Wyatt, who was waiting to get his car patched up: Wright and Hurst, journalists, birds of passage who had dropped in for dinner and a bed, on, or rather off, their way to Paris: and Sladen, whose arrival uninvited, in checked knickerbockers on a motor cycle soon after tea, took Julian's breath away and startled even Olive.

Of what were they all thinking on that pleasant Saturday evening? Mainly of their own affairs, like the rest of the world, civilian or already combatant. Julian was ill at ease: apparently his dose of bitters had taken no effect on Sladen, and he was bracing himself to administer a second, for his mind was made up not to have Sladen at Greys with Olive and Delphine till Sladen reformed and also bought some new clothes. Meanwhile it was a piece of the Devil's own impudence to turn up to dinner (and in checked knickerbockers, too!) as if nothing had happened.—Of the motive that had brought Sladen he had no hint, not the faintest premonitory shadow: if Sladen had avowed it he would have laughed it to scorn.

Leslie Wright was in wild high spirits. It is likely that, when all other classes have joined the League of Nations, war correspondents will be left alone in the opposite camp. Wright, for recklessness, was *primus*

inter pares, and cherished from South African days a bitter grudge against Lord Kitchener: the one cloud in his sky was the prevision of an even stricter censorship in France than in the Transvaal. Alas, poor Wright! in his darkest dreams he never foresaw himself going into the picklepot of Tours. Hurst, his comrade in many campaigns—they had foregathered at the Press Club the day before, Hurst having girded up his loins and fled from Berlin forty-eight hours after the Austrian Note which brought Wright home from Dublin—"Armenian Hurst" was a large, plump, ugly man with a benevolent smile and a shallow light-grey eye, dressed like a tramp in a very old Norfolk suit and a flannel shirt for fear of rheumatism, and smoking a briar pipe because nicotine in any other form is bad for the nerves. Having formed the habit of thinking no further ahead than was necessary, his immediate preoccupations were bounded by the Channel crossing, for he was a bad sailor; as he was also a devout Low Churchman, and liked to go twice to church on a Sunday his impending exile into a country of Papists was an even heavier weight on his mind. Hurst was the son of a Kentish parson. He drew princely pay from a great London daily, and had written one of the best "stories" of the Russo-Japanese war by torchlight as he lay with a broken leg on the stricken field of Mukden. Not once nor twice, in a U.P. or B.B. and C.I. railway carriage, kind strangers had offered to teach him poker.

Near him, Tommy Wyatt reclining on the turf at her feet, sat Delphine, her pretty curls coiled on the top of her pretty head, her pretty person attired in a "grown-up" white silk evening gown (her first) of the

slender 1914 pattern, which gave her infinite joy. She was still cultivating her small dignity, and the ice in her manner to Julian was due to his habit of calling her "old lady," while to Olive she was no more than remotely polite. Unluckily for Delphine, her fine shades were always thrown away upon the genial Julian, while Olive since her first sight of Hurst had lost all interest in her young sister's affairs.

"What a jolly night!" said Denis, returning from the house with a bodge-basket full of ripe gooseberries. "Nobody wants a chair, do they? the grass is as dry as a bone." He set down his burden between Delphine and Tommy Wyatt, but Julian shot out a long arm and took a liberal helping. Julian was lying flat on his back, one knee cocked over the other: his eyes were fixed on the silver roads of cloudland, and he was not taking much part in the conversation.

"Your old favourites, Olive," said Wright, tendering his cigarette case.

"No, no, don't tempt me," said Olive smiling at him.

"Doesn't your sister smoke?" whispered young Wyatt to Delphine.

"Not now," replied Delphine at the same cautious level.

"Why—has she given it up?"

"Yes, these last few weeks she has. You see she couldn't say I wasn't to so long as she did herself."

Wyatt was disrespectful enough to laugh: inside his fair boyish head he carried plenty of common sense, and enough knowledge of the world to appreciate both the pathos and the absurdity of the Charnwood attitude

towards their contumacious ewe lamb. "What's the joke?" asked Olive.

"You are, and do not know it," retorted Mr Wyatt, who had an audacious tongue. But his laughter ended in a sigh: the only son of old John Wyatt and predestined partner in a great flying firm could not be so blind as a great many laymen were. Wyatt was in no hurry and would have liked nothing better than to follow Delphine's pleasant time table of courtship and betrothal. His mistress was very young.

> "Had we but world enough, and time,
> This coyness, Lady, were no crime;
> But at my back I always hear"

the tramp of legions of armed men through the rose-gardens of Europe. Only a few hours ago his father had said to him "Thomas, have you made your will? . . . Then make it." Since it had become necessary to regularise one's affairs, he gathered himself up from the grass. "Delphine and I are going to listen to the nightingales down by the river. Please don't come too, any of you, or you'll scare them away. Allow me, Delphine."

Inscrutably composed, Delphine suffered herself to be handed to her feet with all the dignity that her fish-tail skirt allowed, and laid her hand on Mr Wyatt's arm. "Buds will be roses," remarked Leslie Wright, as the lady and her cavalier strolled away between the cedar trees. "Lord save us! it seems only the other day that I remember you wheeling her about Monte Carlo in a go-cart, and now she's— These things make one feel uncommonly old, eh, Olive? Not that you've much cause

to count your birthdays backwards yet." With his vagabond brown eyes, intuitive as the eyes of a dog, he divined the shadow of sadness in Olive's mood. "Lord, I wonder where we shall all be this time next year! What do you bet on, Julian?"

"Arequipa," Julian returned without any hesitation. "I can't stay away more than ten or twelve months at a time: too many irons in the fire. You might drop in on us next time you're round our way and write us up as a health resort, the climate's ripping and it's a country that has an immense future before it: of course the Spaniards and half-castes have got a cinch on it, but there's always room for a white man at the top—though when he gets there he generally turns out to be German."

And that, reflected Wright, was perhaps the last time for many a long day that Julian would allude so lightly to Germans: though in these tolerant times one might hope that the name of that great and noble nation would never become a term of reproach, as "Boer" had been, or "Frenchman" a century before. But how wonderful was Julian's unconsciousness!

"Shan't you want to stay and see the fun?"

"What fun? Oh, you mean this rotten war scare. Come off it, Leslie, we're all augurs here! I take the *Morning Post*, and I shouldn't listen to your filthy little periodical if you put it into headlines a foot deep."

"Julian, you've been away a long time!" exclaimed Olive.

"Meaning that I'm out of touch? Oh, but it'll all blow over, you see if it doesn't. (I wish there weren't so many bugs in the grass. *Muchas gracias*, Olive, you supply a felt want." He tucked a cushion behind his

head.) "I can remember three or four war scares before I went to Peru, not to speak of 1911. You newspaper chaps love to make a good story."

"This ain't going to be a good story," Hurst's deep soft voice bore down Julian's lighter tones. "It'll be too big to handle even if we get the chance, which I'll guarantee we shan't. As for what you youngsters call fun, any feller that likes can have my share. I've been through five wars and I've had enough: I'm sick of seein' people killed." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and put it back in his mouth.

"Do you think we shall have to come in, Mr Hurst?" Denis asked in his diffident way. Hurst smiled.

"I don't think about it, sir: I know we shall. What no one does know is how we shall come out of it. Some say the fightin' spirit has been bred right out of us. When I was in Cardiff last winter, canvassin' at the bye against Liston, the Little Navy man, it was a common thing to hear the dockers say they'd be as well off under German rule as British. Well off! Pah!"

"So they would," said Wright. "Great country, Germany! Best-run Power going—and the most pacific, if the capitalists of all nations would only let one another alone. But as an organised fighting machine she's a caution. I saw something of their last manœuvres, in a strictly official capacity (not having any wish to follow poor Brandon into quod), and on my soul there was something almost uncanny about them. They're the last word in flexibility and efficiency. Put 'em alongside of our troops in the Transvaal, and we should have looked like an army of mobilised washerwomen.—Purely defensive of course," he added hastily: "there's no Chau-

vinism in Germany outside of a very small Junker section."

"Who writes the leaders for the *Liberal* now?" enquired Olive. "Dear Wright, don't sing me songs about the happy German Michael! I've seen him—having his ears boxed on a parade ground till the tears ran down his cheeks."

"And then you turn him loose on a civil population," said Hurst—"there, what's the good of arguin'?"

"You and your civil population," said Wright: "as if Goethe's countrymen weren't by long chalks more 'civil' than the Flemings or the French! As for us, the odds are we shall take a licking, but it won't be the first time, and—we need it badly. Personally I'm resigned to anything from a German occupation downwards." He gave a sudden chuckle. "It would be no end of a lark, you know. What price organising a secret Press? *And* no British Censor! Holy Saints, I wouldn't mind getting shot by the Germans——"

"You wouldn't be shot," said Hurst. "You'd be subsidised."

"That's the sort of thing," the correspondent of the *Liberal* turned to Olive, "the old ruffian says when there are ladies present!"

"Oh! go on sparring, you two," murmured Olive. "I love to hear you. It's like old times—the old times that won't come again."

Julian had been in a brown study, but came out of it now, characteristically determined on action. "Well, I thought it was all paper talk. But if there *is* anything in it I know what I shall do, and that is cable to Macintyre to go uncommon slow with the extensions we were planning.

The responsibility will be too big to be left to a manager. A row like this would upset trade all over the world. A plague o' both your houses! I say, Denis, I rather wish we hadn't got this place on our hands, don't you? I've a good mind to catch the first boat back."

No one took him up, not even Denis, and Julian, whose perceptions were as fine as his imagination was defective, coloured suddenly to his temples. "You mean that it's too serious—too universal—that I'm like a Cardiff docker myself?"

"You're young," said the oracular Hurst. "Ever seen a man killed, Julian? Beg pardon—stupid of me to forget your South American shindy. But I doubt you've never seen shells dropping in a street packed full of flying women and children. I have. I ain't faddy, but I didn't like it, and you youngsters won't like it any better than I did. That's the sort of thing that makes a man reach for his gun. I'm forty-five, and I shall stick to my job as long as my job sticks to me, but if they give us too big a dose of red tape and blue pencil I shan't grouse if I have to lie my way into the Army. I shouldn't mind havin' a slap at Prussia. As for you, my son, you ain't goin' back to Arequipa, don't you think it; you'll be in Flanders by the spring."

In the silence that followed, a silence on Julian's part of pure scepticism, a deep throbbing hum, far up and far away, suddenly became audible, as if some great bird's heart had suddenly begun to beat. "Hullo, there goes an aeroplane!" Denis exclaimed.

She went overhead flying high and steadily, her dragonfly wings black on the evening light. "Army biplane from Aldershot," said Hurst, following her with

his shallow grey eyes to the very limit of sight. "Not much pace on, but there's a lot of wind up in those clouds. Shouldn't wonder if we got a tossin' to-morrow. You can be beastly sick," his voice grew plaintive, "between Dover and Calais."

Sladen, hitherto dumb, struck in from the outskirts of the group in his insupportable drawl. "I am a man of peace: but if the paths of glory had any charm for me I should count myself lucky to be alive to-day. That dingy material commonly miscalled Khaki will be at a premium. I foresee a general recrudescence of the barbaric standpoint—homage to pure manhood."

"Hard lines on you!" muttered Wright, who hated Sladen. But the dark youth was not readily abashed.

"In the new scale of values, my dear Wright, you and I and Hurst, unless his combative spirit gets the better of his caution, will be all on the same low level. We are æsthetes, and the æsthete will rank lower than the factory hand. Julian and Denis on the contrary, as potential fighting men, will command long prices. But there can be little doubt that the most precious of the lot of us, while he lasts, will be Wyatt—the airman. Unfortunately the odds are that before a year's up he'll be under the daisies."

"Oh, be quiet, Sladen!" said Olive passionately. "Thank God, we can't see the future."

"Some of us would have more to thank God for if we couldn't see the past."

"What—what do you mean?"

But for once Sladen passed on without lingering to enjoy a sensation which apparently he had not designed. "And that, you know, is precisely what Tommy is now

explaining to the nightingales. 'I could not love thee, Dear, so much,' etc. The modern version runs something like this: 'It's a rotten grind but I don't see how I can get out of it.'"

Olive laughed, but her lips were still white. "There you betray your young inexperience. Men in love don't labour under the limitations of their every-day vocabulary."

"Bless her, what a lot she knows about it!" murmured Wright.

"Oh, I don't deny the inspired exceptions," drawled Sladen:—"Martin Laleham, say."

This time the bow was not drawn at a venture. Like most of Sladen's poisoned arrows, it found its mark. They all saw the start which Olive was unable to repress, but before Julian could intervene—and indeed it would have been hard to intervene, for Sladen's malice was nicely calculated to defy reprisals—Martin's own voice said coolly, "To what am I an exception, if you please?"

"Hullo, you here?" said Julian, turning over with a sigh of relief. A moment later he was on his feet and the other men with him, for Martin had brought Sophy too: Sophy in a Parisian array of white and gold, glittering like a rich ghost in the deepening moonlight. "We were strolling down by the river," she explained, "and we could see figures moving about on your lawn, so we got through the hedge and came up. Martin was shy, but I made him come because I wanted to see you, Olive. Miss Evans at the post office told me you were here. Kiss me. Well, that is a scrubby little kiss. Give me a proper one directly or I shall go away again."

She wound her arms round Olive's neck. "Why, I haven't seen you for ages!"

"Sophy! you got through a hedge in those clothes?"

Sophy proceeded to show her customary negligence by sitting down on the grass instead of on the cushions that Julian was heaping up for her. "Dear me! why not? It's quite old, I wore it half a dozen times in town. I'm wearing it out—I'm being economical. Father says he shall cut off my allowance if war breaks out." From the turn of the main road there floated up the prolonged melancholy wail of an old-fashioned motor siren crossed by the grunt of a Klaxon horn. "Dear me, it's all very exciting. Aren't there a great many cars on the road to-night?"

"On the Saturday before August Bank Holiday," said Julian, "there frequently are."

"How dull! You can have them for Bank Holiday cars if you like. But it's much more amusing to think they're all full of generals and admirals and Secret Service men. I'm not heartless!" Her eyes filled with tears. "This war is going to take away everything that makes life worth living. But as we can't stop it we may as well get what fun out of it we can." Not a spark of sympathetic fire lit up Julian's astonished eyes. "Oh well, doesn't anybody understand?" murmured Sophy.

"Fishing in shallow waters, Sophy," said Sladen. "If you want to sing Hymns before Action turn your eyes this way, for you won't get any satisfaction out of Julian. He does not believe we're going to fight, and he violently hopes we aren't. He is a curious study, this brother of mine: the romantic aspect of a knight of the Middle Ages and the soul of a Lancashire merchant. If

you say your *Dulce et decorum* to him in that pretty little voice, he'll love you all the more for your sweet womanly qualities, but he won't love his ten per cents any the less."

He lay back, propped on one elbow, grinning like a schoolboy. Smart things said of Julian to Julian were waste of powder and shot: but to have given them a turn which pierced Sophy's delicate armour—to have reduced her to blushes and Julian to fury—to provoke Martin's wrath while compelling him to stifle it—this was Sladen's notion of revenge, which fell on friend and foe alike, for he had no grudge against Sophy. He had not reckoned, however, with Sophy's own incalculable frankness. She leaned forward and touched his sleeve with the tips of her fingers. "I've always liked you," she said. "If you are unhappy, you needn't be unkind."

"Let him alone," said Julian, struggling to speak lightly. "He's in a vile humour. Come with me and listen to the nightingales."

"Shan't," said the ingrate Sophy, shaking her small head. "I want to talk war with Sladen."

"Come and listen to the nightingales, Olive," said Martin: "they are not usually in good voice on the first of August, but," his voice dropped, "if war comes I may not see you again. . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

Martin had come to Greys against his will but not against his wish. Bitter humiliation it was for him, but he could not keep away. Till that midnight scene at Greys he had not realised how firm, how indestructible had been his hope of winning Olive in the end. High-spirited men, in whom the current of life runs strong, often have this instinctive proud faith in their star, and when it fails they suffer all the more for it. For half an hour or so after his flight from Greys Martin had wandered up and down among the fields like a blind man, at random, in at one gate and out at another; he had not come to himself till instead of wet grass he felt underfoot the hard surface of the high road. Intolerable, this grotesque future in which Olive would become his brother's wife and her children would be his nephews and nieces!

Nor was that his darkest fear. He could not forget Olive's voice saying "I shall not marry Denis." Women often do what they have sworn they will never do, but Olive was not changeable, and there had been a profound sincerity in her eyes which tortured him as much now as it had comforted him then. Is any other passion, even jealousy, so painful as mistrust of the beloved? When the first cold crawling doubt of Miss Charnwood's perfect purity and discretion invaded him, Martin did not know how to bear himself under it. "I shall never marry any man." No, but she would let Denis take her in his arms, she would extract from his caresses a few drops of the same sensuous, illicit sweetness as she had sucked

from Martin's passion: the cold voluptuary, to whom one man is as good as another! Martin struggled against this fear as a man fights with some abominable temptation. But it brought him to Greys.

She was sitting on the terrace steps—four or five wide grassy shelves in the middle of a bank of turf—a little apart from the others, and Martin had thrown himself at her feet. And raising his head now he fixed his eyes on her as though he would have possessed himself of an eternal image of her beauty, from the wreath of black hair to the narrow foot gleaming white through the blackness of an old-fashioned Lyons silk stocking: a noble worn beauty, of which it was difficult to believe evil.

"Will you come? it may be our last chance of a quiet word."

"No," said Olive smiling at him. She would have given worlds to go: not that she had anything to say to him that all the world might not have heard, but because it would have been such consolation and peace merely to be with him, and alone.

"Oh, Olive!—Then I must speak now. I accidentally saw you with Hay last night. Is he— Have I lost you?"

"With Denis?"

"Here—in his arms." Martin's trained murmur carried no further than it was meant to carry. "Oh, be candid with me! *Quand je te dis que je t'ai vue . . .*"

"What—with Denis?"

Repressed anguish is a great strain on the temper, and when the cup is brimful a single drop will overflow it. For a moment Olive, the serene, trembled on the brink of tears—but only for a moment. To be mis-

trusted now, and by Martin of all men! How unfair! And passionately, irrationally angry, as a woman always is when taxed with caring for a man to whom she is indifferent, Olive raised her voice, her eyes sparkling with a deep, impatient scorn. "Heavens, how alarming! Denis, do you hear?"

"What?" said Denis, bewildered. He had heard nothing, but he had seen Martin lift his hand as though asking for mercy.

"We're compromised, you and I: shall you mind if you have to marry me? That step I heard last night on the verandah was Mr Laleham.—But how discreet of you, Martin, to slip off again so quietly!"

Martin was composed enough now, and able to make his little set reply with no more than a little smiling stiffness. "On the contrary, you make me seem very indiscreet. But I only wanted an old friend's privilege of being the first to congratulate you."

"But, *mon Dieu*, he sticks to his point! Julian, you stand *in loco parentis:* will you kindly explain to Martin how Denis and I came to be found in such a delicate situation?"

"Really," said Julian, pulling at his moustache, "you seem very capable of doing that for yourself."

"Yes, that's the worst of having knocked about the world so much. And what the devil does it matter after all? Wright, dear boy, is your offer of a cigarette still open? I've reformed lately on Delphine's account, but I'll take a night off for once."

She took one from the case that Wright in mute amazement offered her, stuck it between her teeth, and lit it from his own, its tawny glow flickering like bonfire-

light over her bold, laughing features. It was the Olive of Yarborough's sketch. She slipped from the step and lounged at full length on the turf, leaning her shoulders against the cushions that Sophy had declined. She was wearing an old French gown of black chiffon, sleeveless and cut very low; it had been reduced to order by means of a great scarf of black Spanish lace, but recumbency is a betrayal of form, and under their loose and thin veiling her long slender limbs and the beautiful curve of bosom and waist were delicately defined.

"Why do you all stare at me as if I were a ghost? You'll see ghosts enough before the year's out, for it'll never be the same again, never! it will be like the land of Egypt— 'There was not a house . . .' "

"What on earth did your brother say to her?" whispered Julian angrily.

Sophy shook her head. "Men never know when they hurt."

"We shall never forget this night, never!" Olive repeated. " 'The night before war broke out . . .' "

"How would you like to celebrate it?" Wright enquired. "Champagne and rose-garlands?"

"And dancing and song? Pagan that you are! Hurst would prescribe fasting and prayer: wouldn't you, Evangelist?" She smiled up at him through her long black lashes. "And convents for all women."

"Maybe," said Hurst, turning away his head. But Wright did not turn away: an amateur of life in all its manifestations, he quarrelled with no woman for loosening her zone.

"I like Wright's recipe better: which comes, no doubt, of being born in Monte Carlo, remote from the good in-

fluences of fogs and Low Church sermons. The lilies and languors—I apologize for quoting Swinburne, Martin: I know he's *vieux jeu*—don't stand much chance over there. I wonder what will become of all our set now, by the by. Little Theuriet with his endless succession of little ladies, Samaruc the poet from Montpellier, Patru of the Café Maritime—do you remember Patru, Sladen, that I used to dance for?"

"That you—*what*, Olive?" exclaimed Julian.

"Oh Julian, I forgot you were there! You weren't told about that scrape, were you? As for you, Sophy, you had better go home: what would Lord Laleham say to your fraternising with a *demi-étoile* from a Riviera pothouse?"

"Are you joking, Olive?" said Hurst.

"Not the least in the world, my friend. I was on every night for three months as regularly as a professional. It was Sladen's doing—he ran across Patru in the gardens of the Establishment and Patru took a fancy to him, said he brought him luck: then I was introduced and Patru fell a little in love with me and offered me a job: it wasn't very *convenable* but it paid."

"Fifty francs a night, if I remember rightly," said Sladen.

"More than you deserved," said Hurst. "Amateurs don't go down at the Maritime—or they didn't in my day."

"Ah! you've been there, have you? Wonderful what an effect the Channel crossing has on the strictest Low Church principles!" retorted Olive. "Patru used to say they went overboard with one's breakfast. He mocked himself of the virtuous Englishman in Paris. No, my

dear, amateurs don't go down at the Maritime, but I wasn't too much of an amateur. Fancy dancing was my line, queer little turns in a mask and a bit of gauze or fur. *Mon Dieu*, how hot it is to-night!" She loosened the clasp of her scarf and pushed it off her shoulders. Feelings not characteristic of country gentlemen or minor poets were roused in Martin by Wright's cynically admiring stare. "Monsieur Patru used to stand in the wings to watch me: occasionally Madame Patru also appeared in the wings."

"Like those *beuglants* on the Champs Élysées," suggested Sophy. "I always wanted to go to one of them and father never would take me. I pined to see an Apaché dance. But he was convinced that I shouldn't like them because they weren't proper."

"I was an Apaché for a week. My partner was a genuine ruffian hired for the occasion, and he came in his workaday clothes, smelling of scent and brandy and perspiration. *Que voulez-vous?* it takes all sorts to make a world, and he was as light on his feet as a bullfighter and his manners, to me, were charming."

"Perhaps he too fell a little in love with you," suggested Martin: "like Monsieur Patru."

"It's more than you would have done—in those days." She turned her beautiful eyes on him with a laugh and a lift of insolent shoulders. "The Honorable Martin Laleham and a slut in a man's hat and a shift and a tattered petticoat—oh là là! I think I see your face! You the correct, the decorous Martin! And yet I made a pretty slut; didn't I, Sladen?"

"Pretty enough," said Sladen. "My own preference was for those little Inventions that we made up between

us, the Cloud, the Black Cat—good heavens, how you did caper about on your little furry paws! or—or—what was it that brought the house down, the night the Prince of Monaco turned up incog.?"

"'Nymph and faun.'"

"Even so: the nymph of the birch tree ravished by a faun, and not sorry for it—like most of her sex. Sophy would have liked that one, for it wasn't at all proper. How did you do it? One could see the faun though he wasn't there, your retreat was the mirror of his advance. Patru was a bad old hat, though. I liked watching you dance, my fair sister: but I am free to confess that even I, who have no Low Church principles, didn't always like watching Patru watch you dance."

"No, now, don't, Julian," murmured Sophy, laying a small soothing hand on Julian's arm.

"I wish I were in Monto Carlo to-night," said Olive. She fixed her bright eyes on the south, where grey hills barred the sea, and a grey sea barred off "that sweet enemy, France," enemy no longer after so many unquiet years. "I wonder what they're doing. Dancing, I'll be sworn, on the true Côte d'Azur principle—

'Dansez, chantez; la nuit tombe.'

You two lucky devils, you'll be in Paris to-morrow: give it my love! I should like to be there when war's declared—*La patrie en danger* and *à bas les sales Prussiens!* In London if a man feels patriotic he gets drunk, in Paris—ah, *mon Dieu!* I haven't danced since I took to high dresses and the cares of a nursery, but I could if I were in Paris to-night."

"Dance for us. I'll fetch my guitar. We shall all enjoy it—especially Sophy."

"My dear boy—in this dress?"

"Patru wouldn't pass it, I admit," Sladen replied with his Satanic smile. "But you can pin it up, my cabbage, and we'll use our imagination to supplement its—shall I say deficiencies?"

"No, now, *be quiet*, Julian," came the faint imperious murmur in Julian's ear; "you'll only make it worse."

"Would it amuse you, Sophy?" Sophy nodded: although she had not seen Olive for two years and no confidence had ever passed between them, she was nearer to understanding her than any of the men, for she was a woman, familiar with a woman's painful virtues of fortitude and self-repression, and with those wild cross-currents that spring out of them, and though Martin's deathly pallor betrayed him, and filled her with pity and dismay, she pitied Olive too. She divined that Olive's recklessness was a revenge that her nerves were taking, not on Martin, but on life itself; and she had hurriedly reckoned over Olive's audience— "Her own brothers, Martin, those two jolly-looking men who seem so fond of her: they none of them count for much unless it were Mr Wright, and he's known her from a child. At all events there's no Patru here!" It was not to be expected that Julian or Martin should take the same philosophic view, but neither of them was in trim to interfere; Julian was too angry to trust himself, and Martin had no title.

"But what shall I do for shoes? I can't dance in these slippers."

"Take them off," suggested Wright.

"And take off that shawl too, I beg," said Sladen: "you cannot dance in the shawl of your maiden aunt."

"At your service, Messieurs."

Dropping the shoes from her feet, she walked slowly across the lawn and vanished into a green glade, moss underfoot, cedar boughs darkly waving over its moonlit entry. Meanwhile Sladen had fetched his guitar and sat down to play it on the steps of the terrace—a beautiful instrument of Spanish make, which he held against his thigh like a 'cello, and out of which he called music almost as deep and melancholy as the twanging of a harp. No one spoke, when low and slow the first bars of the nymph's dancing tune wandered out on the warm night air. But while it was still beating out its echo of the restless throbbing of a forest drum, harmonised by a running brook of grace-notes, a figure crept out of the shadows and stood gleamingly vague in the dappling moonlight: Olive—or a tall elf of the woods?

It might have been an elf, for it was sexless: a slim crooked shape, white arms thrown up and clasped behind a dark head, lithe body twisted under its dark shower of hair like the stem of a silver birch. But when it moved it had the grace of a woman, ivory shoulders completely bare on which the moon painted a diaper of leaf-shadow, ivory back springing out of dark veils that were little more than shadows too, so thin they were, a dimming of whiteness rather than a disguise of form. Two or three undecided steps it took, peering and crouching, the timid and ladylike nymph of the birch tree swaying in the solitude of the moon; then like a nymph grown bold, flinging away fear, it became suddenly alive with movement, tossed in a rhythm of slender stems, blown about

by the fluent trembling of wind in the loosened hair of its leaves . . . a birch tree come to life and dancing all alone in and out of shadow and shine, cold and merry, a wild thing of the woods. . . .

"Properly put on," it was Wright the inveterate journalist who first offered any comment, "that dance would make no end of a hit at the Coliseum."

"That's enough, Olive," said Julian, sickened.

For, whatever the merits of the performance as a performance, it was not likely to give much pleasure to the Head of the Family: one could not, for instance, imagine that Lord Laleham would have been moved by it to pay his deferred call at Greys. But inexorable memories carried Olive on: she was back in the gardens of the Café Maritime, behind her a stage roofed by the mild French stars and sweet with the night breath of stocks and orange blossom, before her the footlights and the fiddles and row on row of green iron tables where a potbellied Riviera crowd sat sipping and staring from under poached eyelids. For them it was not enough to watch the birch tree dancing with its own shadow, they would have considered such a spectacle insipid, and so the cold gestures of the solitary nymph suffered a sudden change: she paused, shivering and staring: with pointed finger and chattering teeth she revealed her terror of the faun who had come out of his cedar tree to ravish her: and it was wonderful how clearly his movements could be seen mirrored in and measured by her own. She shrank, she fled, but she was seized and entwined; in vain she tried to wrap herself in her leaves; rough hands clasped and coaxed her, till at length, in an attitude so voluptuous that the coy nymph had clearly relented and was neither

reluctant nor chaste any more, she sank at the foot of the cedar tree, her head thrown back, the leafy veil of her hair streaming behind, her arms tossed up to pull down the almost visible faun. . .

"*Olive!* . . . It *can't* be you?"

It was unfortunate for Olive that Delphine should have chosen that moment to return to her family. There is no judgment harsher than a young girl's criticism of her elder sister, and before Delphine's round-eyed and rosy and almost incredulous horror Olive had not the courage of a mouse.

"My darling!" She sprang to her feet. "I—I didn't hear you coming——"

"So I see," returned Delphine drily.

She dropped Wyatt's arm and went with a firm step past Olive and Olive's quailing audience and across the lawn into the house. Utter silence followed her. Sophy's tact for once was dumb. Julian was too angry to speak, and even Sladen was inclined to consider that his jest had gone too far. Meanwhile Olive stood motionless as if waiting to be clapped. When the general constraint became unbearable she broke it with a faint smiling curtsey, caught up her scarf, and vanished among the trees.

After her disappearance Martin was the first to recover himself. He was white, but his manner was perfectly natural, and easy and reassuring he smiled into Julian's eyes.

"She has left her slippers," he said, "she'll catch cold on that damp grass. I'll take them to her."

It was dark night already in the wood, but Olive had not gone far, and he soon found her sitting on a bank

under a beech tree, doing nothing, her head and arms drooping as though she were broken with fatigue: as well she might be, after such a strain on her unpractised limbs. Her stockings and a tiny pair of French stays lay on the ground near by, her scarf was thrown over bare shoulders, she had not troubled even to pull up her sleeves: yet when Martin appeared her eyes met his with their faint grave smile as though his coming were no surprise to her—as though indeed her future path were not likely to have any more surprises for her, but stretched out plain to its end.

"Here are your slippers, Olive."

"Oh, thanks—I forgot them; and my stockings too."

He dropped on one knee to put them on for her, and she let him do it, though his hands burnt her with their fevered dryness. Then he seized her in his arms, but still she made no effort to protect herself, and Martin took the kiss that he had so long desired: took it as men take what they desire from women they have ceased to respect. He was coldly gentle: it was not in Martin's nature to be violent: but when she tried to turn her head away he held her face between his hands. It was a minute or so before he disengaged himself.

"Now cry out: tell Julian I've insulted you."

"Don't Martin . . . you'll be so sorry when you—when . . ."

"Not that it makes much odds: after all what have I taken? No more than scores of other men. The question is whether there's anything else to take that other men haven't taken. Was Patru satisfied so cheaply?"

She trembled and bent down her head.

"Were you his mistress?"

"I can't bear much more of this, Martin."

"Oh yes, you can." Again he took her in his arms, and this time he suffered no evasion: she was enlaced in an intimate contact, and one that a less sensitive woman than Olive might have shrunk from, for the icy composure of his manner was more cruel than the licensed brutality of his touch. "If you can bear with Patru and that fellow Wright you can bear with me. You're in my debt for a prolonged delusion. You made me believe you 'chaster than the icicle that hangs on Dian's temple.' I've never dared take even one kiss before. You must have thought me wanting in enterprise."

He heard her murmur "Let me go . . . I shall die. . . ."

"Die of a kiss? How you exaggerate! Once an actress always an actress. No, you're in no danger, my darling: you'll live and make fools of other men. Even an innocent woman would hardly die of this innocuous experience: and you are not innocent, are you?"

"Oh let me go. . . ."

"What a white face! But you are not, are you?—Raise your eyes." She obeyed. "Is the admission painful? But it must be made. Answer me: are you innocent?"

"No, Martin."

". . . Thanks," said Martin.

He released her.

"Now I'm going to take you back to the house. You're very pale: do you feel faint? This has been a trying ten minutes for you, but it was unavoidable. Take my arm, you'll be better in a little while. . . . Ah, Julian! is that you? I've brought Olive, but she isn't up

to much. She has tired herself out. I think you had better see her indoors." They had reached the lawn, and Martin stood aside courteously relinquishing Olive's hand. Julian, who was anxious about his sister, and had come to find her, looked hard at him, but forgot his existence a moment later, when Olive without a cry or a movement to save herself slipped down fainting on the grass at his feet.

CHAPTER XVII

After Saturday night came Sunday morning. Middle-class England on that historic second of August remained, at least in the provinces, undramatically calm. Laleham Chase however, though out of touch, was not exactly provincial, and when the Sunday papers came they were read between the lines. "France is in for it—God help her!" said Lord Laleham, who had a child's memory of 1870. "Then we are in for it too," said Martin with a pale face. Lady Laleham patted Jane and held her peace while she fought down the first of many a cruel stab of pain, the pain that came on so many mothers when they had to let their sons go. But Sophy, the born adventurer, sprang to her feet, her eyes on fire. "Hurrah!" she cried, and then, scenting criticism, "Oh, my dears, if we are in for it, let's go in singing!"

Sophy received no sympathy. Lord Laleham, a natural pessimist, saw his country in ruins, while Martin, having tasted war before, would have been depressed to the brink of tears by the prospect that lay before him, if the events of last night had not made him welcome any distraction as a relief. Immediately after morning church Sophy escaped. Country neighbours who had not seen a paper, or who, having seen, gave one casual comment to the Russo-German declaration, a second to the weather, and a third to the crops, were more than she could bear, and changing into a tweed suit and shooting boots she plunged forth on the open moor.

Here in the teeth of a summer gale her fighting spirit worked itself out in action. The wind lashed her cheeks and made them burn, rain soaked her cap and drenched her hair, and on the muddy track water stood in pools, reflecting every gleam that shone out between flying bergs of cloud: land and sky were full of the spirit of battle, and Sophy's own spirit sprang up to meet it. Soon the park and woods of Laleham were left behind and she was alone on the lonely downs, nothing all round her but purple masses of heath, or now and again a tarn beaten yellow by this day of squalls, or a grove of pine trees bowing their black heads to the blast. Fox Hill was her mark—a triad of wind-wracked Scotch firs topping a hill that surged up like the long crest of a wave before it breaks: their writhen branches promised little shelter but plenty of solitude, and she was startled when a man sprang up from the turf at their roots, bare-headed to the wind's lash—Julian Charnwood.

"Oh Julian, I didn't know you were here!" exclaimed Miss Laleham rather foolishly.

"Wonderful, isn't it?"

Sophy propped herself against a fir tree, her feet well apart, her hands thrust deep into the pockets of her loose jacket. She had not seen Julian since the night before, when, declining with equal curtness Martin's offer of service, and Sladen's, and her own, he had called to Hurst to help him to carry Olive to her room. The group on the lawn had broken up at once, and very little had passed between Sophy and her brother on their way home: Sophy dared not now ask after Olive, as would have been her natural instinct, till she saw her way with Julian more clearly: it was all so painful, so uncertain,

and the mystery that chiefly puzzled her was that of Martin's relation to Olive. Till that night she had not known that there was anything between them, but she was sure of it now, for all Martin's composure. Deep passion can be felt, like a storm before it breaks, by a weight and heat in the moral atmosphere.

Out of the West came a great march of thunderclouds, dark, and trailing purple shadows of rain: they went overhead in a vaporous confusion, their dusky warp shot through with a weft of silver rays: yet the northern sky was of a Spanish blue strewn with crystal boulders that took the sun to windward of their gilt peaks: and all this vast space of storm was in continual motion, clouds rolling, breaking, reforming, gleams falling and fading, while under them the pageant of the August countryside stretched in red of heather, and orange of cornfields, and blackness of wet woods, and violet of Channel ranges, to a rim of sea that bound it like a burning silver wire.

A land of peace, deep, ordered, settled: a land that had never yet heard foreign gunfire.

"There's the illimitable," said Sophy with a wave of her hand.

"And unchanging," Julian answered in a rare flash of imagination. "It must have looked much the same when the Romans marched over Fox Hill."

"You've seen the papers," Sophy continued, rather by way of establishing conversational terms than as a question: one could not doubt that Sladen's brother had seen the papers. Julian nodded, twisting his moustache. "Are you still not excited?" Sophy's voice betrayed disappointment. "I cannot think why people are so dull!"

"How does your father take it?"

"Melancholy but resigned."

"He thinks we shall have to go in, then?"

"Of course—don't you want to?"

"Not a bit. I'm not anxious to fight my best customers."

"JULIAN!"

"So sorry, but there it is!" He eyed her out of the tail of a guilty eye. "I haven't any sentimental feeling for the French. There weren't any in Arequipa except a few small shopkeepers. But one of the few pals I had —almost the only man I liked and respected—was an old bank manager of the name of Albrecht Werner. I don't want to fight a nation of Albrecht Werners! Besides, I hate the wastefulness of war. It's no go, Sophy —I'm not a gay Guardsman like Martin, you know."

Sophy, though still hot with indignation, was betrayed into a little laugh. "I shouldn't call poor Martin a *gay* Guardsman, exactly! Don't you remember? he went out straight from school to South Africa, and distinguished himself by getting taken prisoner the very last thing, when most of them had got past that stage. Poor old Martin! He hated every minute of it with all his heart. He hated camp life, not that he minds roughing it, but he can't bear being herded together with a lot of other men. Besides, he would never make a first-class officer—he has no natural gift for leadership. But of course he'll do his duty, and he won't grumble: Martin never grumbles."

"He'll rejoin his old regiment, I suppose?"

"Of course!" said Sophy for the third time. Julian continued to twist his moustache. Not ten days ago he had heard Martin laying down his views on war, to the

deprecating Denis, as a bloody and barbarous pastime fit only for the Middle Ages. But now it seemed that it went for nothing to have held a lifelong point of view. "I only wish I had his chance," Sophy added with a heavy sigh. "I'd give worlds to go and enlist. Are you shocked?"

"No—do you wish I were?"

She focussed her eyes on him as if she were short-sighted and were trying to discern some object just beyond her ken. "No—why should I? How queer men are! One can't be oneself with most people, but I hoped I could with you. But if directly I do you take it for affectation, I shan't be able to any more! Can't you understand that I'd rather—that thousands of girls would rather go and fight than stay in their safe cosy homes and be fought for? It was bad enough in the Boer War and this will be worse—except that we were all rather pro-Boer, particularly Martin, which made us very uncomfortable. But in every other way it will be a thousand times worse." Tears came into her eyes, bright and unconcealed. "My darling old Martin will be in danger, and do you think I shouldn't like to be with him?"

"What will you think of me if I don't go?"

"Oh, you will."

"Shall I?" Julian asked himself. He did not believe it. Such a prospect was still as remote and fantastic as ever. "But I don't like fighting any better than Martin does, and I'm not a soldier by profession. I've built up a big business with my own hands, and if I don't go back Lord knows what will happen to it. Your brother can come home and pick up the threads of his life where

he dropped them, but for me a year's absence might easily mean a financial smash, and a man that has worked as I've worked, and earned what I've earned, is not precisely keen on beginning again at the foot of the ladder. No, no—I cling to the hope that we shan't be fools enough to shove our oar into any Continental squabble, but if we do I shall leave knight-errantry to the younger men. 'Business as usual' will be my motto. Some one will have to carry on or where will our trade be? My young brother Sladen is just about as likely to get into khaki as I am."

Sophy shrugged her shoulders. One cannot argue with a frame of mind. It was no news to her that Julian was wanting in imagination, she had seen his limits long ago and was resigned to them: indeed she liked them—his hard positive nature was a relief to her after living so long with Martin's fastidious indolence and her father's mediæval ideals.

Black with rain, an immense cloud was bending up out of the West like the belly of a sail; the rim of burning wire was quenched, all distances were drowned in rainy gloom, there was not one rift to be seen overhead, and yet there must have been some invisible chink, for a beam of light had struck down keen as a sword-blade: widening as it fell, it made a splash of rusty, rainy purple in the darkness of the moor: catching the ripples of a black pool it smote them into steel. Then the storm closed over it and the violent light went out leaving all blacker than before.

"Oh," said Sophy sighing, "what does it all mean, Julian?"

"All what?"

"Everything—the world outside us and the world inside us. I wish I could just for one moment know what we are and where we're going, don't you?"

"I generally know where I'm going."

"Duffer, don't be so banal: nobody really knows. How can one know where one's going when one can't even be sure one exists? Suppose we are, after all, only a thought in some one else's dream; wouldn't that be a sell? Because I do feel so tremendously alive, and after all it's on the cards that I'm not."

"You've been reading What's-his-name."

"No, I thought of it for myself. Do you never indulge in such speculations?" Sophy asked, knitting her brows at him. "Oh no, you wouldn't. Sladen wasn't far wrong, there really is a lot of the Lancashire tradesman in you. But surely no one in their senses could live to your age without realising that we can't tell whether we're alive or not?"

"You and I?"

"Not objectively: any way, not the other one of us. I mean," Sophy explained lucidly though in a melancholy tone, "even if I were sure I were I, I couldn't possibly be sure you were you, because it's always on the cards that you're really only me."

"Oh, is it?" Julian exclaimed.

He caught her in his arms and kissed her. "So much for metaphysics! Who am I now?"

"Oh!—Don't do that," said Sophy pushing him away.

He released her, and Sophy without another word turned her back on him and ran straight downhill, stumbling kneedeep in drenched heather, towards the protection of the king's highway. But she had not gone

twenty paces before Julian rushed after her and seized her hand.

"Sophy, my own darling, don't bolt off like a little rabbit! You're not frightened, are you?"

"Let go my hand," said Sophy, suffocating.

Julian held her firmly, not of set purpose, but because he had no idea that he was holding her; his head was spinning like a windmill. Nothing could have been further from his intention than to detain Miss Laleham by force, but all the same she was obliged to stand still, because, as he had placed himself exactly in front of her and was still clasping her wrist, it was impossible for her to walk round him.

"Do wait a second, Sophy!" he pleaded—superfluously enough, as it seemed to Sophy, who couldn't help waiting. "I can't let you rush off in a pet like this. I'm most awfully sorry, I didn't mean to do it, but I've adored you for months, and you looked so quaint with the rain running off your cap, I couldn't stand it any longer. I won't kiss you again till you say I may. But you don't mind, do you? After all it would have come to that in the end——"

"*Will* you let me go?" cried Sophy, crimson with fury.

"Of course you shall go if you want to," Julian remained immovable, "but you might have the decency to wait a bit! I'm trying to ask you to marry me, and how can I while you go posting downhill in all this mud? You don't give me a chance——"

"I think I shall hit you with my stick in a minute!"

She did not hit him—a lingering and dim sense of what was due to female decorum restrained her—but she waved her stick at him in such a threatening attitude

that she made him blink. Then he dropped her hand and got out of her way, and immediately Sophy lost all desire to retreat. "If you are going to apologise," she said, coldly dignified, "you had better do it at once, and then we need never reopen this very painful conversation."

"Oh Sophy! you can't mean that?" Sophy raised her eyebrows. "You can't mean you won't have me? You must have known— All this summer . . . Of course I've always meant to marry you! I fell in love with you the first time I saw you, up on the hill road." He was very much in earnest now, and white under his bronze— and as sincere as he was inaccurate: he had not the faintest recollection of having once thanked heaven that he was not in love with Sophy Laleham. "Sophy, you aren't pretending to be really angry with me because of just now? Oh, you can hit me if you like! Women have to make a fuss, I suppose. But no sensible woman of your age——"

"!!!"

"What I mean is, you're not a baby, so you must know that that sort of thing isn't— Why, if you had been a pretty housemaid— Oh, good Lord!" He ran his fingers through his dripping hair. "Look here, I can't make this thing come right! I started wrong and I keep getting deeper and deeper into the muddle. But you know what I'm driving at. Oh Sophy, you will have me, won't you?"

"Have you? Marry you? Me? After the way you've behaved?"

"Oh rot! you couldn't be silly enough to throw me over for that."

"Oh," Sophy cried, "not for comparing me to a housemaid?"

"I didn't," said Julian angrily, "you twist things! What I said was that I might have kissed a housemaid, and so I might if she was as pretty as you are! If you want me to swear I've never kissed a pretty girl before, well, I won't, that's all. Men only tell those lies to women they don't care for."

"The men I'm used to go on being decently polite even to the women they do care for!"

"Sophy Laleham, don't you dare trot out your ancestors to me!"

He very nearly made Sophy laugh. She was still angry, but with a combative, not a rankling rage, and her head was cool—cooler than Julian's. What a boy it was, after all! as if it wasn't enough for him to have been so very impertinent, he must now turn round and begin to scold her! His mind was packed full of facts, he could work, lead, organise, but when it came to thought or feeling he was a child—and a rather rude, bold child into the bargain. Meanwhile the storm poured on, the wind slashed Julian's bare head and whipped Sophy's petticoats round her legs, their faces were as wet as though they had just washed them: the situation had its comic aspects and Sophy was alive to them, though Julian was not. There was a pink bloom on her cheek and her eyes were as bright as a diamond.

In some ways Sophy was curiously immature. She was not without experience of proposals, but she had gone through them blindfold, and even her engagement to Mr Middleton—a bald young man with prominent teeth—had left her virginally remote. She had never

fallen in love, and on the one occasion when Mr Middleton had imprinted a kiss on her cheek she had felt nothing but a great wish to rub it off. But Julian's kiss? Ah! Julian was not at all like Mr. Middleton. If he had only known it, she was angry not so much with him for kissing her as with her own heart for turning upside down in the process. Many women of fine temperament are reluctant to surrender, and Sophy more than many: and looking up into Julian's face, set in hard, merry, sanguine lines which no mood of an hour could alter, she felt fear and a great uncertainty.

How little she knew of him after all! how little she knew of any man, even her own father, even Martin! Mutual love, however true, involves a difficult and delicate process of adjustment, and Sophy's clear eyes, impatient of romance, foresaw her married life in terms of board and lodging: she might hold her own with Julian in a pitched battle, but one can't be always at war, and when she did not stand up to him wouldn't he, in all kindness, walk over her? Oh, not wilfully—not on principle! no, but because he was prompt and practical, and just stupid enough to believe that what pleased him would please her. And as a lover? It is no crime to snatch a kiss, and yet . . . Honourable he would always be, and fair-minded, and kind in his own way—the tie between him and Olive pleaded for his essential goodness: but passion was an unknown element, and in her twilit innocence Sophy was afraid. Ringing in her ears came one of her mother's trenchant phrases: "Oh, a very good husband as men go: the sort of man who never knocks at his wife's door."

"I was wrong: I own it." Thus the penitent in no

apologetic tones. "That's the worst of roughing it out of Europe, one forgets how to talk to a lady. In Arequipa it's realities that count, but people here like life wrapped in silver paper and handed on a tray. What does it signify? You'll say I ought to have asked you first and kissed you afterwards——"

"No, I shan't!" cried Sophy, but her protest, though energetic, was ignored.

"—but you're not one of those dolly girls, are you, all stays and sawdust? I've been mightily mistaken in you if you are. Talk of natural forces outside us—can't you understand that there are natural forces inside us as well, forces that tear a man to pieces and take him clean off his feet?"

"Not the sort of man that I should care to marry."

"Then he won't be worth his salt: that's all."

"Ah! but how many other women have you——?"

Julian's full-toned assertion carried weight, but Sophy, at the woman's disadvantage of not knowing how to reckon from theory to practice, struck blindly for reassurance. She was such a child that she had hoped to hear him answer "None," but she grew older while the words were on her lips, and putting her hand before her eyes she turned away. "Don't! I'm sorry, Julian." She saw him redden, and intuition warned her that she had angered him, but she was spared knowing that she had wounded his ideal of her; it was not till years later that the tiny scene lay like a map before her, and in retrospect she read his mind and her own. Sophy had the mental delicacy of a Victorian girl. Born out of due time, she could not escape a theoretical knowledge of evil, but it had never occurred to her to connect it with

men of her own circle, with her father or Martin, nay, even with Mr Middleton! But how could she explain, or Julian divine, that she had only meant to ask "How many other girls have you kissed?"

The squall was going over now, bending away to the East in a huddle of purple and blue that stooped low on rainy arches, while westward it lifted over a gold horizon, and the surf of the Channel burnt up again like fire. The rain was falling thinly and the wind dropping to a lull. Pulling out a moist handkerchief to wipe her face, Sophy began to long for warm water and dry clothes: she was cold with agitation and trembling in every limb, and she would have been happy to finish the interview another time. Naturally Julian was not of the same mind. He did not seem to know that he was wet, or Sophy either: he did not even offer her his handkerchief, though it was both larger and drier than her own.

"You must remember that I know very few women, and the one I know best—Olive—has knocked about with men so much that she's brushed off most of her feminine cobwebs." Sophy did not reply, but without her will some play of feature conveyed the retort that she would have died sooner than utter. "'More's the pity?' Yes, I agree," said Julian coolly, "to some extent. That was a devilish unpleasant little scene last night and I wish I'd nipped it in the bud. I suppose it was done for Martin's benefit——"

"His *benefit!*"

"Well, why can't the chap let her alone? Olive's proud, she knows your people don't want him to marry her, and she does her best to choke him off. They ought to be jolly grateful to her! I know what stuff she's

made of, and I can tell you—callous as you think her——"

"I *don't!*"

"—it's cost her as much to give him up as it'd cost me to give you up, which I'll be shot if I'll do! but Olive never can fend for herself. Why can't the fellow take no for an answer instead of hanging about and pestering her? More Martin's fault than hers it was, that wretched little scene: she gave it him like a dose of castor oil, and I honour her for doing it! Wrong? Of course she was wrong—if she had any sense she'd stick to him as I'm going to stick to you and let his people go hang, but it takes more pluck to go wrong with Olive than to be a muslin doll—though what she thinks she sees in a confounded prig like Martin——"

It was at this point that Sophy in her turn forgot the rain.

"A prig—*Martin?* Julian, you really are an idiot! I love Olive, but if she thought that wicked little scene would be good for Martin she must be nearly as silly as you are! *Good* for Martin? why, it was like death!"

"So you're on the side of the Pharisees, are you?"

"If you call that Pharisees——!"

"I never thought you would be one of the stone-throwers. My gallant old Olive!" Julian's voice softened suddenly. "All right, my girl—you may be her superior in womanly delicacy and refinement, but if you had stood in her shoes I'll guarantee Leigh and Walter would have gone to the dogs!"

"Oh, I think I must be dreaming," Sophy murmured helplessly.

"Perhaps after all I'm a fool to marry out of my

class," Julian continued in a tone of profound and reproachful discouragement. "Not but what we were of the same class originally, but we've been transplanted to a different soil and we've learnt to judge by a wider standard. It doesn't annoy me when a man drops his h's or eats peas with a knife—I always thought old Albrecht was going to swallow the handle too—but for you and Martin civilised ritual is second nature. You could never live in Arequipa. You wouldn't know what to do if you didn't have to change your clothes six times a day. I'm not blaming you—it's the way you were brought up, and you're too old now to learn better. I dare say it would be wiser for both of us— Good heavens, Sophy, you're not crying *again?*"

"I'm crying with rage."

"My darling, I wasn't in earnest——"

"I am!"

"Don't, oh, don't," Julian pleaded, trying to console her in his arms. Sophy eluded him. "I never meant to hurt you. Oh, what an ass I am! You know I wouldn't really let you go for anything on earth——"

"As if—oh!—I *wanted* you——"

"But you will marry me, Sophy—really you will!"

"I shan't," said Sophy. "Go away."

'But, Sophy darling——"

"Go away," repeated Sophy, stamping her foot. "I think this must be the ninth time I've refused you. I wouldn't marry you if you lived to be ten thousand, and I hope I shall never see you again. Go away!"

But as Julian did not go away, but stood still with his mouth open, Miss Laleham went herself, turning her back on him with all the dignity that remained to her

when she had dragged the heel of her boot out of a puddle. Julian scratched his head. In the world of thought and feeling, men of action are often as blind as a new-born kitten, and till that afternoon he had scarcely known that he loved Sophy, still less that he hoped to marry her: he had gone through the entire scene on the wings of impulse: his proposal was graced by spontaneity and candour, but on reflection he was not sure that it had any other merits. He was still convinced, in some extraordinary manner of his own, that he would conquer in the end, but for all that, when the whirl of his brain subsided, and he remembered—dimly—what he had said, he could have wept with Sophy. Heavens, what a fiasco! and, for a business man, what a sadly mismanaged affair!

"O Lord," said Julian, "I ought to be in the Diplomatic!"

CHAPTER XVIII

If "great events from little causes spring," it is no less true that great causes beget all sorts of little events, and touch the lives of private people by an infinity of little strings. At Laleham Chase the direct results of the German declaration were that Julian Charnwood proposed to Sophy Laleham and miscarried badly in his proposal, and that Sophy came in late for lunch and was rebuked by her father. "I wish you would be more punctual, my dear," said Lord Laleham, irritable because he held a quantity of Austrian securities and because he was not easy in his mind about the German fleet: "it's after two o'clock. Where have you been all this time, and in such rain too? enough to give you a bad cold! Were you under shelter?"

"I went for a walk on the moor. I did get wet. I had to change."

"You stayed out alone on the moor till two o'clock on a Sunday morning? My dear, what were you dreaming about? You know I like to get lunch out of the way in good time on Sundays."

Sophy slowly turned crimson. She could not tell a lie. "I wasn't alone. I met Julian Charnwood."

"Did you change your stockings?" intervened Lady Laleham. "—That was right. I suppose Julian Charnwood was full of the war. I saw the two girls in church this morning. The little one is blooming, but Olive looks very fagged and much older. Try these gooseberries, Claude, they're out of my own kitchen garden. There

is nothing nicer than a big green gooseberry. Come with me, Sophy my dear, and we'll pick some more for tea."

She carried her daughter away, leaving Martin alone with his father. Lord Laleham sat for some time silent, fingering his wine-glass and holding up the ruby-red French wine to the light.

"There is not anything in that, I hope, Martin?" he said abruptly.

"In what, sir?"

"I fancied Sophy looked a wee bit conscious when she mentioned that fellow Charnwood's name."

"Oh, you mustn't ask me that," said Martin, rousing himself. He too was looking fagged and pale, if the war news had left his father at leisure to observe it: his eyes were vague and blind like those of a man half drugged. "Young girls have their fancies. But Julian is a nice fellow enough and I'm sorry you don't like him."

"You were up there last night, were you not?"

"I'm afraid we were."

"You and your sister?"

Martin made a gesture of apology. "It was only for an hour after dinner. We went by the fields. Sophy thought they might have later news."

"Philip Smith tells me Julian Charnwood is a liberal subscriber to the hunt. He is evidently trying to edge his way into society, but he will hardly succeed so long as he has those other young fellows pinned to his coat tails."

"Die for your country, Jane," said Martin. "No, you small worm, I didn't say scratch yourself for your country. Not but what we did in South Africa."

". . . This must cease," said Lord Laleham, coming

out of a reverie five minutes later. "This can't go on." He drank off his wine with a heavy sigh and stood up. "Oh, and, Martin . . ."

"Sir?"

"Have you—er—thought at all about your own movements, in the event of our going into the general mess?"

"I shall rejoin at once, of course, if they'll have me."

"Ah! I felt sure you would say so. . . . Dear me, a quarter to three! It's I who am keeping the servants about now. Well, my boy, I wish I were twenty years younger. It's hard on those that have to sit at home! But we mustn't grumble, we must just go on and do our plain duty, and thank heaven when it is plain. Only, for the sake of the house, I'm sorry there are not two or three little olive-branches growing up. I'm not so young as I was, and once or twice lately I've begun to suspect that it wouldn't take much to make an old man of me. I should have liked to see my grandchildren before I die. But you have never felt drawn towards the Holy Estate?"

"There was no hurry. I'm barely thirty-one, and men don't marry young nowadays. But, yes, as things are turning out, it's a pity. Perhaps, in view of the exceptional circumstances, I may yet prevail upon some patriotic lady to take me without a trousseau. Then I could leave the olive-branch in bud before I go."

"Don't jest on such a subject, sir," said his father, trying to look stern. "Jinny, eat that crumb." After the immemorial manner of small dogs, Jane eagerly sniffed all round the crumb and then sat on it, thus obligingly giving Lord Laleham an excuse for a smile.

"See now: if I were you I should run up to town and have a look in at the War Office to-morrow morning. Get hold of Townley, hey? it would do no harm, and you would hear all that's going on."

"Good idea! Yes, I will."

"Right! and now I'm going for my usual stroll round the stables."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Martin, rising to open the door. Lord Laleham eyed him quizzically. The heir of Laleham hunted and shot because territorial heirs are expected to hunt and shoot, but he was no sportsman at heart, and it was not his habit to accompany his father on those Sunday afternoon strolls.

"No, my son," returned Lord Laleham with one of his disconcerting gleams of irony. "These are early days yet. I won't ask you to cultivate an interest in horse-flesh till you're ordered on foreign service."

Martin's offer had in fact been a little inconvenient. Lord Laleham, who was as fanatic a disciple of George Washington as his daughter, strolled down to the stables, but he came out again in ten minutes, and made his way furtively to the footbridge, and so up through the fields into the plantations of Greys. It was an unceremonious entrance into enemy country, but he was afraid of being seen if he went by the road. He found the thin place in the hedge where Sophy and Martin had scrambled through the night before—a wisp of Sophy's gold embroidery still hanging on a thorny spray—and gained, seemingly unobserved, the shelter of the drive.

Was Mr Hay in? Mr Hay was in. Then would he

see Lord Laleham for ten minutes on business? If my lord would step this way, Littledale would inform Mr Hay.

"Beautiful Olive," murmured Sladen, supine on cushions on the verandah, his heels higher than his head, "the shares of Charnwood and Co. are on the up grade."

Indoors in cool shadow, Olive was buried in the *Observer*. "Interpret."

"I have just seen Lord Laleham emerge from the shrubberies and timidly approach the house."

"Emerge from—Lord Laleham? I don't follow."

"It isn't a joke," returned Sladen, rising up in one smooth spring from the hip and ankle like an adder from its coil. "I shall now go and ask Littledale if he has seen any old tramp hanging round the premises, and Littledale will be shocked and will tell me why the noble lord has come to call. Never ask questions, Olive. It is an ill-bred practice: and people tell you more when you don't."

Littledale had shown Lord Laleham into the library, a shady room both darkened and scented by a magnolia whose pale waxen flowers peered in at the open window. Drops of rain were still thinly falling, but the wind had lulled and the slow-moving clouds were full of light. A pleasant outlook: and the room was pleasant too with its dim blue of wall and carpet, and its engravings after Corot and Harpignies, and its shelves of dusky brown and tarnished gold. Lord Laleham, who remembered it in Mr Jack Charnwood's régime of plush and lincrusta, was struck by the change.

And when Denis came in, dressed in grey country clothes made for him by "Mr Burnaby—well, Burnaby,

then," and stepping softly in his brogued shoes, Lord Laleham was even more surprised. The young man was certainly very much altered since the night of his arrival at the Chase! Lord Laleham had met him many times since then, but never at such close quarters. Plain he would always be, but he was more personable now that his early shyness had worn off a little and his garments were no longer those of an underpaid clerk. Never had Denis or his surroundings made such a favourable impression. Nor did he destroy it when he came forward to set an armchair for Lord Laleham, not offering to shake hands, but smiling faintly as he laid down his peaked cap and heavy stick.

"I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"Thank you, no: not at all."

Denis sat down on the windowseat and crossed his legs. He felt, like Sladen, that it would be ill-bred to ask questions. "I've been into the village. People here don't seem very keen about the news, do they?"

"The war news? Oh ah—no, I dare say not. Ideas travel slowly in the agricultural counties, I'm afraid. But we shall have plenty of time to get used to this one. Now I want to have ten minutes' talk with you, if you will forgive me for disturbing you with business matters on a Sunday. I shall have a good deal on my hands to-morrow, and I should like to set my own house in order before I take up any county matter. I've delayed far too long already. But we can't go on like this for ever, Mr Hay."

"Laleham."

Lord Laleham started as if he would have sprung out of his chair, but controlled his agitation and leant back,

throwing one shapely leg over the other, and fixing his brilliant eyes upon the lean bronze head framed against a lighted sky. He was evidently puzzled, and Denis faced him, frank and gentle, only too eager to give all that his father had courage to take. There are honest men who have subtle eyes, and there are knaves who look like honest men; but upon a few faces their true character, good or bad, is stamped beyond mistake, and of such was Denis. Even Lord Laleham was shaken for a moment and felt a cold uncomfortable qualm. This young man had not—it was idle to pretend that he had —the aspect of a swindler.

"Well: it is very strange: and yet when I look at you I can't help feeling"— Denis's heart bounded—"that you believe in your own claim." This was not exactly what Denis desired to hear, and his face fell as he settled back into his old patience. "Yet it's almost incredible. Let me see now: you are—how old? Twenty-eight?"

"Thirty-five."

"So much as that? You don't look it. But of course, to be consistent, you couldn't call yourself any younger. More than thirty years ago! Half a lifetime. Now, be frank with me: you have an open, honest face, if you'll allow an old man to say so, and I am sure you won't find it an easy or a grateful task to carry on a fraud. Besides, there are no lawyers here, and whatever passes between us in private is to be taken without prejudice. Come now: you can't sit there and solemnly assure me that I am your father?"

"Yes, sir, you are."

Lord Laleham made a little movement with his hand

as if to brush off a splash of moral mud: as if Denis had disappointed him by an indelicacy. "I'm afraid I don't feel any stirrings of the sentiment of paternity. Perhaps it will surprise you to hear that I loved my little son: that he was five months old when I lost him: that I have a perfect recollection of his baby features. He was a healthy little fellow, but he had one dangerous illness soon after he was born; and many a night I've walked up and down our—the room he slept in, carrying him in my arms. He was a dark child: when he was born his hair was almost black."

"Dark children often grow up fair. You don't remember any birthmark that I—he—had about him?"

Lord Laleham shook his head. "I do not: and of his nurses one is dead, a second tells me she can remember no mark of any kind, and a third I can't trace. But it's hardly likely that any woman would be able to swear to a mole on a baby that has been dead these thirty years. You on the other hand will not lay claim to any early memories. Children of five months don't register their small impressions. My little son barely knew me when he was taken out of England."

"No, I don't remember anything before Mollendo."

"Ah! Well, that makes no odds—I beg your pardon?"

Denis had shifted sideways and was looking out of the window and not at his father. "My first memory is of being taken to say goodbye to my mother. She was in bed, and they put me down, I suppose, on her pillow, for I can remember playing with her hair: she had very long black hair."

"That will do."

"I didn't, of course, then know she was dying; but afterwards my f—Mr Hay explained it to me. He said she said I was to give you a message from her."

"Good God!" said Lord Laleham under his breath, "was Edward mad?—That's enough, Mr Hay: I don't receive messages from my wife through the medium of Mr Delahay."

But it was impossible to turn Denis when he had set his hand to the plough, and he plodded on: "He said she said when I grew older I was to go and ask you to forgive her."

"That was not madness: that was a deliberate insult. Edward knew well what he was doing when he sent me that message by the mouth of his own bastard.—Forgive me for using an offensive expression; it is not your fault that you are—what you are. But five and thirty years ago I was a hot-tempered man, and there are wrongs one never can forget. Did your father tell you that he fled from England to escape me?—Enough of that. My son, Mr Martin Laleham—" Denis opened his eyes: though by now in no mirthful humour, he was faintly tickled by this excessive formality—"is going to rejoin his regiment, and before he is sent, perhaps, out of England, I wish to come to a settlement. If I were to die while he's away it would be very awkward for him to be confronted with this claim of yours." Denis was mute.

"When you came to the Chase I was taken by surprise and I couldn't listen calmly to your story. It seemed altogether too monstrous." Lord Laleham paused, feeling that a little of his former heat had crept back into

his voice. "I used expressions which you, perhaps naturally, resented. But now you have nothing to fear."

"Thank you," Denis murmured not without a shade of irony. Expressions that one might resent did not apparently include the term that Lord Laleham had flung at him a moment ago.

"You have papers to support your claim?"

"Letters and certificates: proofs."

"'Proofs'—oh! not quite proofs, surely, Mr Hay, or they would have seen daylight before now? 'Papers'—let us leave it at that; papers on which I dare say a clever lawyer could build up a good prima facie case for you, a case which it would be very expensive and for me very painful to fight. Now what have you to gain by fighting? Nothing, in my lifetime. My son is dependent on me, he hasn't a penny of his own. Now I am not sixty yet—I married young—and we're a long-lived family. I am good for another twenty years, perhaps thirty. Suppose by any legal quibble or posthumous chicanery on the part of Edward Delahay, who hated me as I hated him, you won your case, you might be sixty-five yourself, an older man than I am now, before you were a farthing the better for it."

"But——"

"Whereas, if you'll hand over your papers or burn them before me, I will settle on you an allowance of £500 a year for life, to be increased to £800 if you marry. Not a penny more. Those are my terms and I'm not prepared to raise them. But on that income you can live—comfortably—in idleness for the rest of your days;

and if you are as honest as you look it will be sweetened to you by the thought that you haven't embittered the last years of a man who never did you any harm, and whose younger life was ruined by your father's treachery."

"But if I won," sheer astonishment made Denis even more bald than usual, "wouldn't you give me any money?"

"Certainly not."

"But if I *proved* I was your son——"

"Silence, sir!" Lord Laleham cried out, lifting up a hand that shook like a leaf. "You're not my son: but if you were I'd never acknowledge you. If I had the begetting of you, Edward had the breeding. If he had worn a glove of mine, should I wear it again after his fingers had soiled it?"

Lord Laleham's eloquence, if a trifle too florid for Martin's taste, had at least the merit of lucidity. It could not have been clearer if he had cut his son over the face with his whip. The cup of wormwood was brimful and Denis drained it. Hitherto he had always believed that, once proof was forced on him, Lord Laleham's attitude would alter, but now he realised his error: there would be no change—unless it were that the elder man, stubborn in remembered pain, might choose to regard him as an accomplice instead of a victim. There was no bridging the gulf between him and his father's love.

The banished man pines for his native country; though he might weary of it if he lived there, and Denis longed with all his heart for a place, a name, and ordinary family ties, which the ordinary man values lightly enough.

A verse of an old song—he had heard Olive sing it—was running in his head:

"For we are exiles from our fathers' land . . ."

Yes! exiled for ever. It was not in Edward Delahay's power to undo what he had done.

There was a kind of relief in knowing the worst, for his long uncertainty had been a great strain on Denis, whose intuitions as a rule made up his mind for him without debate and in the twinkling of an eye. They did so now. Life was once more tranquilly divided into the things one could and couldn't do. Almost before the echoes of Lord Laleham's voice had died away, Denis turned from his contemplation of the magnolia, pale and grave, but uncomplaining, and indeed almost cheerful; for an idea had come to him which went some way to console him for the loss of his personal hopes.

"If it really is no good—if nothing ever would convince you—I shan't go to law. I don't want to make you unhappy, sir. You're older than I am and you've borne enough already. And £500 a year is a lot of money, more than I've ever had the spending of. But there is one other thing I should like: it won't cost you any more: it's about other people, not me at all."

"What is it?"

"Well, it's about the Charnwoods. You know how good they've been to me: most awfully good: I couldn't tell you all I owe them. Out in Mollendo Julian was—well, he was a gentleman and mixed with gentlemen, and I didn't, but he never let me feel it. He offered to lend me money to come home; it was practically giving it me, because I wasn't likely ever to pay him back. If," said

Denis reddening suddenly, "there was any old thing I could do for Julian I'd do it, if it was to cut off my right hand. No one ever had a better chum than Julian's been to me."

Lord Laleham nodded with a not unsympathetic smile.

"Now he wants to settle down at Greys, here in his old home that his father had to sell. He's no end keen on ancestors and coats of arms; and Chippendale too and old carpets, and horses and dogs. And he wants to marry an English girl."

Lord Laleham, a sick fear at his heart, had no doubt that plenty of English girls would be ready to marry him.

"Oh yes, I expect so," said Denis simply. "But you see where it is, Greys is close to Laleham Chase. It wouldn't be very pleasant for him to live here if you and Lady Laleham wouldn't look at him. You're the swe—the—" a timely inspiration came to him from the *Portsmouth and Dorchester Chronicle*—"the Natural Leaders of Country Society."

"Oh dear me," exclaimed Lord Laleham, "what an odd fellow you are!"

"I was brought up oddly. But what I feel is that it's mainly because he's friends with me that you won't be friends with him. I do hate that, sir. Poor old Julian! I believe you think he ought to have stopped me coming to you. But he couldn't stop me. Nothing could have stopped me. I know now that he did try to warn me. But he always says I'm one of those fellows that never see a brick wall in front of them till they hammer their heads against it."

Lord Laleham's smile was dry. "I dare say not."

"So then if I were to drop my claim and clear out, would you be fair to Julian now, sir? It isn't as if he really was a—a snob, everyone likes him, even people like Mr Smith or—or Mr Laleham. And it isn't only Julian, but the girls too: not the other boys, they can fight their own battles: nor so much Delphine—she's just got engaged, and besides no one that knew her could help loving Delphine: but Miss Olive." Denis hesitated in a distress which Lord Laleham was quick to appreciate, well qualified as he was to distinguish between delicacy of the heart and mere lip-prudishness. "It's difficult for her, she's proud, and yet Miss Laleham is so fond of her, and it isn't as if she wasn't fond of her too, only she's too proud to let her go on coming here under the rose. Would Lady Laleham come and call——?"

Lord Laleham drew a long breath. This then was the bargain that was being offered him by the oddly simple young man from South America: peace at the price of his consent to the social rehabilitation of the Charnwood family. Was there more behind? Philip Smith had let fall a hint . . . and Martin's manner after lunch had been evasive. . . . Peace at the price of Sophy's marriage to Julian Charnwood would prove an expensive luxury!

To her marriage? No, that was an over-statement. It was far from certain—he could not bring himself to imagine—that Sophy wished to marry Julian: it was not even clear that Julian wished to marry Sophy. It was all comfortably vague. At worst he would only be receiving Julian on trial, and it is easy to receive a man nominally on trial while one's mind is made up to refuse him in the end—and from this piece of clear-cut cynicism

Lord Laleham retired again into a convenient and easy-going vagueness. Why not? He had not a strict conscience nor even a nice sense of honour where Denis was concerned: the fellow was little better than a common blackmailer. Peace, oh! peace from this nightmare that was hanging over him!

"And if I promise to receive the young Charnwoods on a friendly footing again—as in the old times when they and my own young folk were all children together—I may take it that I shall have no more to fear from this preposterous claim of yours, which, as you rightly guess, has been at the bottom of any animosity I may recently have felt?"

"No—no more to fear."

"You'll hand over your proofs—your alleged proofs—or burn them before me?"

"Ah no! I can't do that."

"Not—? But then what in Heaven's name——"

"I haven't the right. It's a—a trust." Denis was visibly struggling to find clothes for his ideas: "a trust from the dead to those that come after us. I'm a link in a chain and I can't break it. But I'll leave Laleham and raise no claim so long as you, sir, are alive."

"And after my death?"

"Martin and I'd soon settle it. He'd believe me."

"Good God!"

Denis perceived that he was giving less pleasure than he had anticipated. "Or I might die before you: then it would never come out."

The reaction from hope was very bitter. "You're generous! But the risk is not great," said Lord Laleham with a savage laugh. "Why, you young fool—but

never mind, we need not enter into that. Such an arrangement isn't practicable. I should have no security but your bare word." Denis turned as white as a sheet: the insult was the keener for being evidently unintentional. "Besides," the elder man went on in an agitation which he was less and less able to control, "I can't go on living in this nightmare. I must see these 'proofs' of yours. I must know whether your story is true or false."

"What—you're afraid it may be true after all?"

"No, of course not: the thing is absurd on the face of it. But you see, Mr Hay, I'm getting an old man, and I—I feel nervous now and then. Anything so terrible —Martin disinherited—a stranger thrusting himself into my boy's shoes— Good heavens!" cried Lord Laleham, starting to his feet, "one is only human after all! No man could live with such a sword hanging over his head!"

"Oh . . . I didn't know you felt so bad as all that."

"No, I see you didn't," Lord Laleham answered quite kindly. In the mental confusion that was coming on him he seemed to address Denis as two different people: now as the ruffian holding a pistol to his heart, and now as the good neighbour to whom one could appeal for pity. And the scene was becoming an agony to Denis; he could not bear to watch his father's wilful strong personality crumbling into old age with all its weakness of mind and body, and to know that the change was his own handiwork. "One must try to see both sides; I can sympathise with your affection for your friends, and I'm sure your motives are most unselfish, but for me the situation would be, naturally, intolerable. I cannot live at the mercy of a blackmailer. I must have these 'proofs' before me: they must be tested: they must be destroyed."

He beat with his open hand on the table. "Destroyed: burnt. Give them to me, save me, save my boy, and I'll overlook everything—I'll consent——"

"Are you in here, Denis?—oh! a thousand pardons!"

It was at this juncture that Sladen strolled into the room. Learning from Littledale that Lord Laleham had come to see Mr Hay, he had sat in the hall, nursing a violent curiosity, till it grew too strong for his never very muscular conscience. Not a flicker of any feeling but polite surprise appeared on his imperturbable gambler's mask, and his voice fell like drops of water through the heated atmosphere. "A thousand pardons if I intrude, Lord Laleham, I had no idea you were here. But, dear me, won't you sit down? I'm afraid you're not well. Denis, dear fellow, why don't you bring Lord Laleham in to tea?"

Lord Laleham held Sladen in detestation. He would as soon have betrayed weakness before Edward Delahay. Shaking the cloud from his wits, he stood haughtily erect, rallying every faculty to repel impertinence. "Thank you, no: I came to see Mr Hay on a matter of business, and in private."

There was more of the snake in Sladen than a lithe frame and a swift agility. "Oh, don't let me interrupt your Lordship." He turned towards the door. "Perhaps I shall find Sophy on the lawn?"

"Are you speaking of my daughter?"

"Ought I to say Miss Laleham?" returned Mephistopheles with an oily smile. "So sorry, I must have picked it up from Julian."

"Clear out, Sladen!" said Denis. Sladen departed grinning triumphant, and Denis, every hope wrecked,

could only make a mute gesture of apology. It went unregarded. The impression that he had been carefully building up was effaced, and of his dual personality nothing remained but the ruffian. A vague unformulated hint, that could be thrust into a mental cellar and the key turned upon it, was a very different affair from the same hint translated into Sladen's cutting coarseness. Besides, in Lord Laleham's illogical eyes, the members of a household which included Mephistopheles were all tarred with the same brush: and, more than that, a great wave of renewed confidence went over him as he told himself that after all there could not be one word of truth in a fable which went to prove that a son of his had sunk to be Sladen's friend.

"I won't keep you from your tea much longer," he said, struggling to speak calmly, though his chest heaved with a young man's rage. "Oh, no apologies, pray: I ought to be very grateful to Mr Sladen Charnwood for letting in a sidelight on the situation."

"Sladen was only rotting."

"A bow drawn at a venture? Think again! That is hardly up to your form. Ah!" he took a step forward in such a rapid blaze of passion that Denis thought he would have struck him, "no doubt it would suit your book well enough to disappear 'and no questions asked' on condition that my daughter married young Charnwood! He's your very good friend, isn't he? and Miss Laleham will have her mother's money."

"Don't! don't!" said Denis, ashen-white, and retreating towards the door. Flight was better than such a quarrel.

"No running away now, please. You've said your say, and I'm not ashamed to own that you took me in for

ten minutes: it's no discredit to an honest man to be taken in by a rogue. But not twice, Mr Denis Hay. Will you be so good as to name a time for producing your papers?"

"But I don't want to produce them if——"

Every sign of irresolution poured fresh life into Lord Laleham. Ah! this was the way to deal with these blackguards. Why hadn't he called the fellow's bluff long before?

"By heaven, sir, if you back out now I'll prosecute you for blackmail!"

"If you goad me into it," exclaimed Denis, hunted and at bay, "yours is the blame."

"I'll bear it. Name your day: I suggest to-morrow."

"Oh, all right—to-morrow."

"At what time?"

"The sooner the better."

"I warn you, you had better have a lawyer. I can telephone to my own man of business and get him down by a morning train, but it may take you a few hours to put your hands on the class of rogue that will do your dirty work."

"I shan't want a lawyer."

"As you will. Shall we say twelve noon, then, and at Laleham Chase?"

"If you like."

"Good." Lord Laleham turned to go. Denis, courteous to the end, held open the door for him, and received in acknowledgment a slight inclination of the head. But by that stiff, nervous movement Denis saw how weak the elder man had become, how fevered and shaken: he might have been twenty years older than the easy hand-

some rider of that March morning on the hillside road. And suddenly a strange, an agonising pang wrenched at the son's heart-strings: how white Lord Laleham's hair was growing! and whose doing was it but his own? For the first time in his life regret for lost youth seized him, the saddest of all regrets, and irremediable.

"Father!"

Lord Laleham struck the compassionate hand from his arm. "Enough of that! Are we living in a French melodrama? 'Mon père—!' I prefer the legitimate theatre. But Edward was famous as an amateur actor. One sees you're his son."

"Goodbye, then, sir, till to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIX

Late that Sunday night, or rather in the small hours of Monday morning, Sladen Charnwood, never a sound sleeper, came down from his room to find a book and some soda water. To his surprise, when he passed the drawingroom door, a breath of cool air and a parallelogram of moonlight clear between the opacities of drawn blinds warned him that one of the tall windows was open. There was a good deal of old silver at Greys, and Sladen, in thin silk pyjamas and barefoot, catching up a heavy stick, strolled out to see who was there. But instead of a burglar he found Denis Hay, still in the grey tweed suit that he had worn at supper, restlessly pacing up and down the verandah with his slow, soft stride. Sladen came up behind him, and slipped a hand through his arm.

"Anything wrong, my dear friend?" There was no answer except a heavy sigh, and Sladen's shrewd sarcastic eye travelled inquisitively over the troubled features. "Aristotle is down on his luck. Is it a heart ache or a stomach ache? Cheer up, tell daddy all about it; I'm first class at giving advice."

"Are you?" said Denis smiling. "Then I wish you would take a dose of your own medicine! You made a horrid mess of things to-day, old man."

"So I hoped," returned Sladen unabashed. "Serve him right! 'Are you speaking of my daughtah?' That sort of thing raises the devil in me. I owe old Laleham a grudge of long standing, and Martin too; for all his

fine manners, the good Martin has his own little knack of letting you know the difference between porcelain and common clay. I meant to pay them both off with interest, but now I doubt I shan't get the chance. I let old Laleham have a pretty fair instalment to-day though. What a colour he turned! Green wasn't the word for it. Are you in labour of a sermon, Galahad? Let me have it: I'm inured to them. I've been preached at all my life. 'Doesn't seem to have done me much good though."

"Well, wasn't it a bit rough on Julian?"

"Meaning that I queered his pitch? But old Laleham's got to get used to the idea sooner or later. Lord bless you, he lives by bread and cheese like the rest of us! When he cools off he'll reflect that Julian has a pot of money and that there are undesirables in all families, and he'll instruct the fair Sophy to ask for my head on a charger: and Julian will offer me a hundred a year to go back to Monte Carlo and stay there. I've seen Julian beating up to windward of that proposition ever since he came to Greys."

"I do wish you wouldn't always sneer at Julian!"

"The sneer exists only in your imagination. I respect Julian as a philosopher of life. Aristotle, you're not in it with him: you never can forget that there are other people in the world. They don't trouble Julian. But he's a handsome fellow. I admire him," said Sladen, with the odd detachment of outlook that made him seem sometimes like a wanderer from another planet, "and I shan't mind giving him a leg up. Never you fear, my Denis: the pretty Sophy will take him like a shot, and the pair of them will snap their fingers at papa and mamma.

I foresee wedding bells and orange blossom safe enough in that quarter. Julian's in a deuce of a temper to-night though, I thought the decanters were going to fly when I essayed a little gentle persiflage at supper. What's the betting he met Sophy on the Downs this morning and had his hair combed? Or perhaps it's a case of conscience: the Lancashire tradesman doesn't want to fight."

"Fight whom?"

"Germans, nincompoop."

"Oh yes, I forgot. But why should he? There'll be plenty without him, and he's never been in the Army," suggested Denis mildly. Sladen looked up and down again: he had fallen to whistling a little tune, pensive and soft.

"D'you ever read poetry, Denis?"

"Poetry? No! why?"

> "But while the west bin red to see,
> And storms be none, and pirates flee,
> Why ring 'the bells of Enderby'?"

Sladen hummed the words under his breath. "Denis, the bells are ringing all over England to-night. Hark! don't you hear them?" He raised his hand, and Denis, literal as ever even after five months of Sladen's metaphors, listened obediently. But he heard no note more prophetic than that of the church clock striking half past three from Laleham village, and the ceaseless rippling murmur of the stream through field and wood. Sladen gave a little laugh and pressed the arm that he was still holding. "There aren't any bells except in my head. What a matter-of-fact chap you are! To return to our

original topic: why are you looking so down on your luck?"

"Because I've made a muddle of things."

"Tell daddy."

Denis shook his head. "I can't. I must go on by myself. But it's . . . heavy."

"Made a fool of yourself—eh?"

"M'm."

"Not a woman?"

Denis smiled in spite of himself. "Rather not!"

Sladen continued to whistle eight or ten bars of his little tune. "I touched a small cheque last night. If a few hundreds now lying idle to my credit——?"

"No! no!" said Denis very curtly.

Sladen dropped his arm with a jerk. "Honestly come by, Denis—I swear it!"

"My dear old man," Denis exclaimed, shocked and startled, "you know I didn't mean that!"

"Didn't you?" returned Sladen, impassive, or nearly so—he had been hard hit: "no, now I come to think of it, you wouldn't. I do wonder what it would be like to have a mind like yours—all so horrid and clean, like the old woman in the workhouse. D'you never believe evil of your brother?"

"Not of this brother, any way."

"Ah . . ." said Sladen on a long quiet breath.

"If I wanted to borrow money, naturally I'd come to you or Julian. But it isn't money: I'd never bother about money. It's one of those puzzling scrapes that you're in before you know it (if you're a dunce like me), and once in you can't get out without hurting other people."

"A moral scrape? No: Sir Galahad doesn't stumble into the mire."

"Oh for goodness' sake, Sladen, don't talk rot like that!"

"What, are you in the mire?" Denis nodded. "Be comforted: others have gone down deeper and got out again. Moreover I doubt if you know what mud is. Look at me, how cheerful I am! *You've* never cheated at cards."

"Have you?"

"Often."

Denis considered the point for perhaps a minute, then —"I'm sorry, Sladen," he said gently.

Sladen turned, folding his arms on the high balustrade and staring out into the night with keen hawk-eyes that saw far other scenes than the blanched fields of Laleham. The moon, nearly full, had climbed round over roof and dormer, and hung bright as a pearl not far over the Channel hills in a veiled and neutral-tinted sky. Greys had seen many full moons. It welcomed the mild light which came peering in under its high verandah arches, and throwing Sladen's shadow, slight and black, across the diamond-patterned brickwork of its Tudor floor. "I'm sorry too," Sladen said in his odd clear drawl. "I'm very sorry I've made such a mess of my life, but I'm not going to whimper over it. *Cui bono?* It's done with anyway: all over and done with. Never any more the dirty red-hot nights or the cold squalid days when you wonder what the devil you did it for. I'm going out of it all. Oh my God, the blessedness of taking an order. In all my adult civilian life I've never taken an order or stood up to be drilled, and I wanted it d——d badly.

There are thousands like me, you know. Sixteen—seventeen—I can put my finger on hours in my life when one thorough thrashing might have made a man of me, but I didn't get it. There was no one to give it me, with Julian in Peru. D'you think it's too late now? 'Sir?' 'Very good, sir.' 'Beg pardon, sir'—that's the way you talk to an officer: and if he calls you an infernal ass you salute and are much obliged to him. I salute like clockwork. And then you've got all sorts of jolly little brass buttons to keep clean, and you rub 'em up in all your spare five minuteses, and one day you overhear your comp'ny officer telling the Serjeant-Major that that chap Charnwood's got the makings of a smart soldier in him." Thus Sladen Charnwood, stripped of every rag of affectation, unbosoming himself of his heart's desire while the night carried his country forward to the eve of war.

Denis rubbed his nose in some bewilderment. "Do you mean that you're going to enlist?"

"Enlist? No, you ass: I'm a seasoned veteran already! I'm in the London Scottish—been in them for years."

"The Territorials? What on earth for?"

"Oh, go and read the *Spectator!*"

"But—but—doesn't anybody know? Does Julian know?"

Sladen grinned. "Not—on—your—life! Nor anyone else either." This was a way of speaking, for the *Messenger* men knew all about it; no one in Sladen's family had seen him in uniform, but Marsh the dramatic critic (Artists' Rifles) and Foyle the junior leader-writer (late of the C. I. V.) had walked round him when he first

put it on, criticising the sit of his tunic. "Julian wouldn't believe it if I did tell him. Last time he was in town he ran slap into us near the Horse Guards, looked me in the eyes and didn't know me: I passed within arm's length of him—near enough to hear him say we were a dirty-looking lot. *Hai!* One does get a bit dusty after a fourteen-mile route march with packs and rifles. But only two of us fell out."

"That was fine," said Denis warmly. Sladen had always seemed to him much older than himself. But he was reminded now that the enthusiast was only twenty-six.

"Pretty fair. But it's no catch to be in the Territorials, you only get ragged if you let on. They think we're no good. Just let 'em wait a bit——"

"Who?"

"The Regulars, you idiot—we shall get our chance now, and I rather fancy we shall make a few of them sit up. We've never had much of a show before, though some of the old Volunteer regiments did pretty well in South Africa. But we're not a bad crowd. Give us good officers and we'll go wherever we're asked. And mind you some of our officers are tophole: you should see Murray, who commands my company: he used to be in Paget's Horse. Personally I'd follow him to Hades, and I shouldn't go alone. I may be a blackguard, but I'm not a bad judge of men—it's my trade—and I swear we shan't be far behind the Regulars. We're amateur troops to-day and we should be the better of a stiffening of old soldiers, but give us six weeks under fire to put a polish on and then ask for news!" The hatchet profile was unaltered, but the black eyes glowed. It was a pity

that Sophy Laleham could not have received Sladen's confidences. Of all the men of her immediate circle he and he alone, whom Lady Laleham had likened to an organ grinder, flamed with the authentic ardour of war.

"You do really think we're going to fight then?" Denis asked for the tenth time in the last twenty-four hours: it was still incredible. Sladen laughed again.

"Galahad, you're not clever. Doubtless that's why I find your company soothing. Now I have brains, but all they did for me was to send me picturesquely to the devil. Yes, I do think we're going to fight. What did Olive say? She has brains too, that fair sister of mine: so has Julian for that matter, only he keeps them for Sundays. Fight? rather! O my Lord, are we going to fight? Are those fields of standing wheat across the valley going to be reaped?—We're going to fight, I'm going to fight, I'm going to fire a bloody rifle—ten to one they're fighting already! Ten to one? Ten thousand to one! Germany won't wait, she counts on striking a knock-out blow. What's more, we're going to be thrashed. Hurst and Wright swear it, and they know a thing or two. Yes, we shall take a thrashing at the outset—much good may it do us."

"But we shan't all have to go and fight, shall we?"

"Doesn't Galahad see himself in khaki?"

"*Me?*"

"You will soon enough. Wait till we've chucked our men into Flanders—wait till the casualty lists begin to dribble in. It'll be hell, Denis, hell for the Standing Army. My one regret is that I shan't be in time for the original Brock's Benefit. They'll bear the brunt:

we shall pick up the bits—if there are any. But they won't—they can't keep us back very long."

"But weren't the Territorials promised never to be sent abroad?"

Sladen executed a deft wink.

"But is that fair?"

"Fair? Oh! When it comes to a toss-up between fighting Germans abroad and fighting them in England——!"

"How soon will you be off?"

"Three months, with any luck. But they're a muddle-headed lot at the War Office." He sighed. "However, there'll be no more fancy soldiering for any of us. I handed in my checks at the office last night. Old Penley was very decent. Foyle said he wasn't sure he didn't envy Marsh and me—you recollect Marsh? he's off too——"

"But you've never resigned from the *Messenger* already?"

"Oh! Good Lord! Watson, you excel yourself. Ain't I telling you?" Sladen faced round in the ghostly half-light, thrusting his hands into the pockets of his thin silk jacket. "Would you like it all over again in words of one syllable? I came down here to say g-double o-d good, b-y-e bye, goodbye to you and Greys and all my little friends, and I shall go back to town in the m-o-r-n-i-n-g morning, and that'll be the last of me. We shall all be ordered to report ourselves to-morrow or the day after. To-morrow? Gad, it's to-day! The moon's down: there's dawnlight in those clouds."

"It's very wonderful," said Denis soberly, "to hear you talking like this. Because it isn't only that you like

fighting, is it? I mean, I can see that you like fighting, of course, you enjoy the excitement and all that: but that isn't all, is it?"

"What more, peripatetic one?"

"Well," Denis hesitated, "you say, of course I don't know anything about it, but I hear you say you aren't satisfied with yourself. There are things you're—sorry for, most of us feel like that——"

"Most of us don't cheat at cards."

"Well—if you really did. . . . Of course I don't know whether you're putting it on a bit or not, but . . . Isn't that partly why you feel half glad about the war?"

"Glad?—I feel as if I were plunging into a bath."

"All the mistakes—well, then, more than mistakes; all the mess and disgrace going to be washed away?"

"If you like," Sladen answered rather curtly.

"And," Denis unconsciously dropped his voice, "more even than that, isn't there? I don't want to be inquisitive, but it's so hard to know what's at the bottom of English people when you weren't born among them. Well, I was born here: but living in America all my life, what defeats me now I'm home is the things that are taken for granted. Couldn't you, for once—? I don't know much Latin: but I've heard my father" (he meant Edward Delahay) "quote that old Roman motto: civis Romanus sum. He said one ought to be just as proud to say 'I am an English citizen.' He felt that himself and he brought me up to feel it. You do too, don't you?" Sladen was dumb.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," Denis said with a gentle firmness. Perhaps he guessed that to have that confession torn out of him would be a safeguard for

Sladen Charnwood in days to come, when high courage had sunk to a mere clenched tolerance of blood and dust, and the tormenting devilries of old desire were struggling to refix their fangs in the languor of a body worn and wearied by ineffable toil. Perhaps Sladen knew it too: he knew, none better, the frailties of his own character.

"I think I am going to die," he began, then stopped, as Denis made some small shocked sound: but after a moment he went on again: "I have that dream—superstitution—call it what you will, I have it strong on me to-night, Galahad." There was another silence. "Don't you grieve: I hope I am. I never have looked forward to making old bones, but this is a better way out than chloral or one's own revolver. Too good for me. To go out fighting, think of it! as we shall fight, perhaps one against ten: they'll never forget us! and we shall all sleep together out there, good and bad, Murray and I, no distinction after we're dead if," he raised his hand to indicate the vague expanse of grey countryside, stream and woodland and wide valley and low horizon hills, "if we died fighting, after all, for England."

CHAPTER XX

In the library at Laleham Chase Lord Laleham sat waiting for his son.

It was warm uncertain weather and the room was rather dark. Facing north, it would have been darker still if the Charles Laleham who fell at Naseby had not enriched it with a noble oriel, thin fronded traceries sprouting out of the bleached stonework like ladyfern on a cliff. The upper lights were blazoned with the arms of Laleham, *or, a chevron azur between three crosses potence of the first:* the three tall panels commemorated a visit of Anne of Cleves, ruffled women and sworded men, peacock and leashed spaniels, walking on a winding stair in a green landscape under fretted towers and a blue and silver sky. A small side window, filled with the natural view of park and field and wood, unlit and unshadowed in the tired monotony of an August morning, furnished an illustration of the inferiority of nature to art.

Within doors Lord Laleham had unconsciously dramatised the setting of the play; a long table had been cleared and a seat placed for Denis near the door, while at the other end his father occupied a Jacobean armchair in all the dignity of a judge. Midway sat Henry Trelawney, representing the legal firm of Trelawney, Son, and Hanmer; a man of eight and thirty, tall, calm, and athletic-looking, his flattened temples, thoughtful eyes, and heavy jaw stamped with the print of a life's training in law, which breeds keen brains and a hound-like type of head to hold them. Before him lay a fountain pen and

a spring-bound notebook, and he sat shuffling the loose sheets together in his large, long-fingered hands, almost in silence.

Near the window sat Lady Laleham, her feet on a footstool, her fingers flying round the heel of a silk sock. She had inobtrusively refused to come on the stage, and her powerful, plain, kindly face wore a resolutely commonplace expression, as though determined not to pander to the male passion for red tape. For Grace knew all at last. She was so startled by her husband's pallor when he returned from Greys that she attacked him pointblank, and Claude, who never had liked keeping a secret from his wife, gave way with a sigh of relief; but Grace, though sympathetic, was mysteriously reserved. Very silent, as if least said were soonest mended: very gentle with her husband, whom she understood only too well: very tender to Martin at dinner: irritable, to do her justice, with Sophy, who was not to blame and would not suffer: thus Lady Laleham faced a situation which startled and perplexed her.

She had insisted on coming into the library. Vainly had Claude protested that she ought not to be exposed to "that fellow's impudence." Grace did not say "Fiddlesticks" but it was on the tip of her tongue and legible in her eye. Vainly too did Claude point out that it would be merely a formal business interview. "Well, and haven't I any head for business?" was her reply, but inobtrusively she did her best to dissipate that inhuman atmosphere. Dressed in her usual morning gown of cool summer poplin, her thick hair gathered up in grey waves and a string of pearls lying round her still smooth, powerful throat, she had planted herself and her

knitting at ease in the fresh air of the window, for "I'm sure we want all the light we can get," she said as she threw it open. Thirty years of married life with a husband to whom she was devoted had bred in Grace a curious little habit of speaking in parables.

Trelawney, the professional observer, would have felt easier if Lord Laleham had been as cool as his wife. It is never wise to lose one's temper in a law suit. Claude enjoyed universal affection and respect—the name of a man incapable of rough word or harsh deed. But it had not always been so. Thirty or forty years ago young Mr Claude Laleham had set himself to *épater le bourgeois*, with the usual inconvenient result—for, whatever may happen in the long run, in the short run *le bourgeois* generally wins. The world was easily shocked in the eighties, and what began in mild irritation, when Claude coquetted politically with Parnell and æsthetically with the poet of *The Sphinx*, developed into a resounding scandal after the lovely Viola Laleham ran away.

It was all so long ago that the world had forgotten, but Henry Trelawney had been looking up the Laleham divorce case, and through the discreet files of the Law Reports there had loomed dimly the figure of a violent, sensitive, proud man wrought to frenzy by grief and shame. The Queen's Proctor had intervened, for there had been talk of collusion—a hideous business, for which Claude had to thank partly his own Quixotic generosity to the cousin who had betrayed him, but mainly his own contumacy in Court. If ever any man came near wrecking his own case by sheer wilful insolence, it was Claude Laleham under cross-examination. "Certainly I sent him money.—I dare say they seem large sums to you.—

From no motive that this Court would understand.—I protest against the aimless indecency of these questions!" Well, well: it was a brief but lively scene, and a scandalised Victorian world, after tittering at the joke, had sent the jester to Coventry, till his father's death and his marriage to Grace Cordeaux opened a way for his return.

And now Trelawney was shocked to see the old intemperate insolence cropping up again, the old scornful anger. Lord Laleham would brook no discussion. Temporise, not he! A mild "This fraud—if it is a fraud" provoked such a glow of ill-repressed passion as left the lawyer aghast: for he could not but think it a strange sort of fraud which could so soon and so conclusively be disproved. There either had or had not been a child buried and a child born to Edward Delahay in Mollendo between 1879 and 1881. Why, if it was a fraud, were place and time so narrowly limited? But "Would you have me be civil to a pack of swindlers?" cried Claude—videlicet Denis and the whole Charnwood family! As it happened, Trelawney had been introduced to Julian at his club, and had taken a flying impression of a handsome merry face and an unaffected manner as honest as daylight: and he said so to Claude: but he did not say it twice! Trelawney's even temper was not fretted—making allowance for an unreasonable client was merely part of his job: but he felt that it was all very unfortunate.

The turret clock, set high over rose and portcullis and the faded blue and gold of the Laleham shield, struck twelve. "That fellow is not coming," said Lord Laleham.

"Perhaps he has thought better of it after all," said

Trelawney cheerfully. "Fraud or personation is a dangerous game to play. Edged tools and all that."

Grace looked up from her knitting. "I forget if you have ever met him?"

"No, Lady Laleham. Never had the chance. I wish I had: one likes to form one's own views."

"I thought perhaps in town. . . . My son has taken a great fancy to him. I believe they have lunched together at Martin's club once or twice."

Grace was an adept in the art of getting things conveyed without words, and the lawyer knit his brows.

"It's a strange case whichever way you look at it. Still, if he hasn't pluck enough to face an investigation——"

The door opened and a servant announced "Mr Denis Hay."

Denis came in. He was in his grey suit again and he had learnt how to keep his clothes; Trelawney took note of the sandy hair, well brushed back from his tanned forehead, the plain shirt links and shapely hand, the loose stride and well cut boots. Denis's face fell after a glance round the room, for he had half hoped to find Martin: but Martin, upon his father's gentle propulsion, was in town for the day, calling on Townley at the War Office and imbibing news of Longwy and Delle. Trelawney rose to his feet: Claude bowed without rising: but his wife held out her hand with her usual friendly smile. "I can't get up," she said, "or I shall drop my stitches. How d'ye do—very warm, isn't it? I suppose you came by the fields."

Lord Laleham icily named the two strangers to each other: "Mr Hay—Mr Trelawney." Denis bowed and sat

down in the chair set for him, pulling up his trousers: dangerously at his ease, Trelawney thought, and more like a winning horse than the agitated elder man. They were not alike, however. The Lalehams were all dark, father, son, and daughter. But hard on this reflection Trelawney caught a most significant glance from Lady Laleham, first at him and then up at the Hals portrait of Charles Laleham hanging over against his own oriel. Allowance made for the rich Stuart dress and curling lovelocks, there were the same long thin nose and sandy hair: and Trelawney fairly started in his chair—"By George, a fox Laleham!" Then he chid himself for fancifulness: but the impression left on him was very strong.

"I won't waste time on preliminaries," said Lord Laleham, "except to say that Mr. Trelawney is entirely in my confidence. His house have been looking after our interests for many years. Now state your case as briefly as you can."

Grace dropped her knitting and wrung her hands together as if in a silent appeal: "Oh don't, my dear, don't!" But Lord Laleham's head was turned away.

"I shan't keep you long, sir," said Denis.

But he did not seem to know how to begin. Trelawney, who was tearing a piece of paper into scraps and making pellets of them, put a question in a quiet business-like tone, apparently to give him a lead.

"I understand that you pretend—legal language, Mr Hay—to have some rights in the succession to the Laleham property?"

"No."

"I beg your pardon?"

"No, I don't."

Trelawney turned to his client. "But, my lord——"

"I don't claim anything at all."

"You're drawing some distinction, perhaps, which my client and I don't follow."

"No, I'm no good at distinctions," Denis replied. "I mean just what I say. I have all along done so. I'm not going to make any claim at all, not now nor never."

Trelawney's legal calm was fairly broken up. "Then why—what on earth—what, may I ask, brought you here to-day?"

"Lord Laleham made me come. I'm very sorry that you, Lady Laleham, should have been bothered about me. You never need have been, nor need Martin be, it would worry him I know, and that would be a pity for nothing." Denis sighed: of all that he was giving up, what he most regretted was the friendship of Martin and Sophy, because that alone could have been won without a struggle. Strangely drawn together from the first, he knew that his bare word would have been enough for Martin, and he had hoped against hope that his father at the eleventh hour would have taken Martin into confidence. Better for Martin, however, as it was.

Dead silence fell on the room while Denis proceeded in his statement.

"Lord Laleham told me yesterday that he couldn't live with such a sword hanging over his head: that he could never be happy till my papers were burnt: and by him, not by me—it wouldn't satisfy him unless he saw them burnt with his own eyes. So I thought the best thing was to bring them along and hand them over. Here they are."

From the pocket of his coat he drew a sealed envelope on which were a few lines of writing, and these, in a brisk, unemotional tone, he read aloud:

Greys: August 2, 1914.

I certify that this envelope contains the only original papers I have ever held bearing on my own identity, viz.—

Two letters of Lady Laleham to Mr Delahay, September 10 and 15, 1879.

Two letters of Mr Delahay written in answer, September 11 and 16, 1879.

One letter of Lady Laleham to Lord Laleham, November 8, 1880.

One letter of Mr Delahay to Lord Laleham, December 2, 1880. When I have given this envelope to Lord Laleham, no other proof will remain in my hands.

Signed Denis Hay.

Witnessed. Julian Paradel Charnwood.

T. Wandesforde Wyatt.

"Would you mind passing this envelope to Lord Laleham?" He gave it to Trelawney. The lawyer deliberately read over the superscription and examined the signatures before passing it on.

"These are the only relevant papers you have ever held?"

"Yes."

"Originals?"

"Of course."

"And you withdraw your claim—a withdrawal which is tantamount to an admission that you can't prove it?"

A spot of colour burnt in Denis's cheek. "We needn't go into that."

"Excuse me," said the lawyer, "it is my point. You're

taking an unfair advantage. Because my client is well-known to be a man of scrupulous honesty, you throw on him the whole onus of a most difficult and disagreeable duty. Obviously Lord Laleham can't burn these papers. They must be examined and sifted, witnesses must be hunted up, very likely a competent man will have to be sent out to Mollendo: and all this, which perhaps you couldn't conveniently do at your own expense, must be done at ours. This is, I must say, a very easy way of going to law."

"I beg your pardon," returned Denis. "Have you a match?"

"A match?"

"Lord Laleham wants one."

Claude had not listened to Trelawney. Picking up the envelope, still sealed, he had gone over to the fireplace and was now looking about for a matchbox. He found one, a blue flame spurted: Lady Laleham cried out: Trelawney, making an unceremonious dash across the room, was barely in time to wrench the envelope out of his hand before he set light to it. "Good heavens!" said the lawyer aghast, "my dear lord, forgive me—you never would have forgiven yourself, you know!"

"But why not? Now that his fangs are drawn, surely the sooner we get rid of all this rubbish the better!"

"No, no," said Trelawney, soothing him like a child. "Sit down and talk things over quietly. You mustn't, you really mustn't act in such a hurry. The law's delays, you know. Important affairs can't be settled in five minutes, and you only get into mischief if you try." Taking Lord Laleham by the arm, he piloted him back to his chair, without daring to glance at Lady Laleham.

"Come now, sit down," and he put up the envelope in his own pocket. Claude let himself be over-ruled, but he was evidently of his own opinion still, if he could be said to have anything so rational as an opinion. He was looking brilliantly handsome in a hectic way, his cheeks flushed and his eyes abnormally blue and sparkling, so that Trelawney wondered if it would not be well to drop a line to his medical man; but nothing could be done till he could get to speak with Lady Laleham alone. Meanwhile one must slide over the regrettable incident of the match.

"Now, Mr Hay, as a practical man: you must see how awkward it is for us, this line you're taking. Can't you give us an explanation? We have a right to ask for it."

Denis, who had risen, sat down again with a sigh. Never a talker, he particularly disliked talking of himself; but he had come prepared to face a delicate and painful examination, and with Lady Laleham's eye on him there could be no escape.

"Oh, all right: since you wish it. Let's see now: you wouldn't like to pretend that I really am Denis Laleham, but you might get so far as that I think I am? Let's leave it at that: I'm not, but I believe I am. Now when I come to England I'm such an ass that I take my welcome for granted. After all, this is my own home where I ought to have been living all my life, and having been kept out of it for thirty years is no reason for my being kept out of it for ever. Besides, even if other people don't like my turning up, my father must have been fond of me once, and when I come back to him surely he'll be glad."

He waited for a word of acknowledgment, but none

came, and he turned more directly to Lord Laleham as he went on.

"So then I come to Laleham. You . . ." he paused again. "I don't want to speak bitterly. I don't feel bitter. It was all so natural. But you ordered me out of the house. Can you imagine what I feel like as I go away?"

"Presumably," Lord Laleham was examining his polished fingernails, "that you're not having such an easy walk-over as you expected."

"Oh, all right," said Denis placidly. "But I feel dreadfully upset any way. Then I think: 'I'll wait a bit, and have a look at my brother and sister, and see if things shape any better when you get more used to me.' So I do, and I liked them—awfully: and they like me too, or any how Martin does. He sees I mean well though I am an ass, and he likes me because he's clever and I'm not, or because I do so like him. But then I begin to find out other things. That I can't take my own place without shoving Martin out: that there never is room in this world for a dead man to come to life again. . . . Oh! I'm not quick over it, like Martin would be if he were me: I hang on ever so long—because if I'm not Denis Laleham, who am I? No one: a bas—an illegitimate son, and without a relation in the world. I don't so much mind about the place and title, though they're mine: but I shouldn't care for that if I could be a second son, say, Martin's younger brother, so as not to be nameless and so deadly alone. . . ."

His voice failed for a moment, but still no one spoke, though Grace looked imploringly at her husband. Denis however was not disappointed, for he was not expecting

pity, and would have been horrified to hear that he was telling his tale in a pathetic way.

"So I drift, never seeing clear ahead, and one thing I do that isn't honourable. That £1000 you sent me: I never ought to have taken that." Trelawney pricked up his ears, his client had made no mention of that £1000: does any penitent ever confess all his sins? "I'd like to pay you back, but I've spent most of it, and I never was any good at earning big money, so that I dare say I never shall."

"Do not. I'll take these papers in consideration of it, and think myself cheaply rid of you."

Lord Laleham made his son wince, but not so painfully as the others. "I beg of you—" Trelawney broke out, but pulled himself up. Nothing could be done now, before one whom he was bound to regard as an adversary. "Am I to understand," he turned to Denis with a marked courtesy of manner, "that you're abandoning your claim out of personal feeling for Mr Laleham?"

"And for—another who would feel it more." Denis gave him a hurried, appealing glance, lowering his eyes. "Don't—don't sift the papers, Mr Trelawney. Give them back to Lord Laleham: or, better still, do you burn them. Burnt they must be."

"Unread?"

"It would be safer."

"Safer for us?"

"Why, you see—" Lord Laleham, feverishly handsome, was plainly a thousand miles away—"no one that had cared for my mother could take her letter for a forgery."

Then Henry Trelawney put a question in which he was

perhaps not altogether loyal to his client. "Have you thought well before taking this step, and are you sure you will never regret it? You have a long life before you, and as a lawyer, who sees a good deal of human nature, I may warn you that men's views often change very much with changing periods of their life. In the event of your marriage and the birth of children, for instance. These letters once destroyed— Assuming that you act in good faith—your ships are burnt for ever, Mr Denis."

"Oh, I shan't marry."

"Many young men say that." Trelawney shrugged his shoulders. "Yet the world goes on being peopled. However, we'll waive that point if you like and come to another. My client is a wealthy man and you, I gather, are not. These papers are worth a good deal to us. Not that I think," he eyed Denis shrewdly, "they would prove your case. Possession is nine points of the law, you know, and I may add cash in hand is the tenth. Still we're glad to be let off a contest, and I tell you frankly, if you had a legal adviser at your elbow, as you ought to have, he would recommend you not to behave so Quixotically but to come to a composition. It would be more satisfactory for Lord and Lady Laleham," he faintly stressed the latter name, "as well as for you, if you did."

"Trelawney," cried Claude, "what are you about?"

"I feel sure, my lord, you would wish me to act fairly by Mr Denis."

"No, no," said Denis, standing up. "I can give Lord Laleham my mother's letter, but I couldn't sell it."

"But if you go off like this, Denis, what will you do?"

It was the first time Lady Laleham had intervened,

and they were all startled, as if they had forgotten she was in the room. But Grace's presence was not to be ignored when she chose to make it felt. Calmly and kindly she smiled at Denis over her knitting. "I should just like to know how much money you have in the world."

"Oh, heaps: all I want."

"Half a crown?"

"Enough to get out of Greys without owing Julian a penny. There'll be the rent and the servants' wages till the end of the year. But I've plenty: I added up my bank book last night."

"That's a great consideration," returned Lady Laleham, invisibly sarcastic as usual. "But when your debts are paid what will you do for a living? You mustn't be cross with me for asking, for if you were Denis Laleham I should be your stepmother, and I've no patience with stepmothers that don't look after their stepsons."

"Cross with you? No fear! It's only too kind of you," said Denis remorsefully, "after all the worry I've given you. But I could always get a job, a great strong fellow like me. Julian'd give me a reference."

"As a bank clerk, or a railway porter? You're a foolish unpractical boy. But don't give me your would's or could's. Where are you going now, when you leave us?"

"My dear Grace," Lord Laleham was evidently repressing violent irritation, "what can it signify to us where the young man goes?"

"Oh," Denis fell back on the phrase he had heard from Sladen, "I've found a way out."

"That means the Army," said Grace, laying down her work. "I knew it."

"Oh, Lady Laleham! But I might have known you would guess, for we shall all be in it, shan't we? Martin, and Sladen, and Wyatt, and they all seem to think Julian'll have to go: and if anyone goes I ought to, because I haven't any ties. It never struck me till Sladen came to say goodbye last night" (Grace, through all her preoccupations, found time to raise her eyebrows over this extraordinary manifestation on the part of the organ-grinder), "but directly he did I saw it was the very thing for me. So I went over to the barracks at Countisford early this morning, that's why I was a minute late. I want to get into Martin's regiment, and they say for that I must join up directly, before the rush. So you see no one need worry, because of course I should have done it in any case, sooner or later."

"You hear, Claude? he says 'of course,' just like Martin."

"So now I had better get off." Lady Laleham had jumped up and gone over to her husband, and Denis, who was feeling tired and nervous, bowed to her from where he stood. He would have bowed to Trelawney too but the lawyer insisted on holding out his hand. Not so Claude, whose blue eyes shone with irritation and scorn.

"Oh, speak to him, Claude! don't let him go like this!"

"Really, my dear, I'm much obliged to you and Trelawney," Lord Laleham was drumming an impatient tattoo on the table, "one would think you both found the young man's going a matter for regret!"

"He may never come back——"

"A bastard, and a blackmailer: so great a loss?"

His wife wrung her hands together as if she could scarcely bear herself. Denis turned in the doorway and

smiled at her, shaking his head. "Past patching, dear Lady Laleham," he said, "it is so, sometimes. Thank you, and goodbye." She covered her face with her hands.

"Why, Grace, Grace," Lord Laleham sprang up: he had not seen his wife weep for many years, "my darling, what is it?"

"Oh, Claude, he is your son!"

Lord Laleham's face changed. Its wilful hectic beauty crumbled into white defeat. He signed to Trelawney, but Denis was already through the door, and before the lawyer could follow he was arrested by a choking cough and the crash of a falling chair. He turned round and saw Lord Laleham on his feet but hanging across the table, while his wife, her tears over, held a handkerchief to his lips.

"Ring the bell, Henry." Lady Laleham had known Trelawney from boyhood, and her reversion to the Christian name was the only sign she gave of agitation. "George must telephone at once for Dr Somers. Now help me get him on the sofa. It's nothing to be alarmed about, Claude. A slight hæmorrhage, that's all. No, no cushion under his head." Then, supporting her husband on her arm, while he began to cough again, and turned, suffocating in his own blood, to the shelter of her breast, "Will you find Denis now and bring him home, before it's too late?"

But when Trelawney reached the avenue Denis had gone.

CHAPTER XXI

Not more than three quarters of an hour later Denis walked out of Greys, carrying with him as many of the necessaries of life as could be packed in a handbag, and leaving stupefaction behind. He was fairly cheerful, although he had less than ten pounds in his pocket—£9 7 4½, to be precise—and the cheque written for Julian would leave him without a farthing in the bank. His only serious worry was a fear that he ought to have tipped the servants at Greys: true, a man need not tip his own servants, but were they his or Julian's? He could never feel that he was Littledale's master. On such points Denis was often harassed by an apprehension of duties imperfectly grasped. Finally he resolved to send his last five pound note to Julian to disburse as seemed good to him, for Julian, of course, would know what to do—Julian was a man of the world: and with a mind thus set at ease Denis walked briskly into Laleham Halt and took a third class ticket for Waterloo.

It was a slow train, and while he was jolting through the grey countryside, and changing at Basingstoke, a telegram sent in pursuit of him from Greys was flying on its way to the *Messenger* office in Agar Street. Sladen's fount of candour had run so dry after his midnight interview with Denis that he had ridden off on his motor bicycle before breakfast without bidding goodbye to a single member of his family. But the *Messenger* men, who knew all about him, welcomed him with their genial *Moriturum Salutamus.* When the yellow enve-

lope was put into Sladen's hand he was dictating extempore extracts from the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung* to a harassed subaltern of whom Penley was demanding copy on the strength of a Cook's tour in the Black Forest: and he read it sitting on his inky desk while the rest of the staff hung round him and slapped him on the back.

"Sladen Charnwood *Messenger* offices Agar Street W.C. meet the train arriving 5.50 five-fifty at Waterloo from Laleham Halt find Denis take him home or if impossible on no account lose sight of him. Most important don't let him go Play up for once in your life Julian If necessary make him drunk This is serious Julian."

Serious or not, Sladen grinned over this effusion, which his friends said could only come from a lady; and then he counted the words: and then he said to himself that he could not let Julian's two and fourpence halfpenny be wasted, and he slid off his desk and went to Waterloo. Foyle had just proposed a staff supper at the Chine o' Beef Restaurant, to drink his health and that of Marsh, who was also expecting to be called up for service in a day or so: but Sladen said the lady of the telegram had a prior claim, and went off uncomplaining to Waterloo.

It was a day of comings and goings. He met Martin on the platform on his way home from the War Office, but as Sladen never wished to be civil to Martin, and was not for the moment inclined to be uncivil, he stepped behind a kiosk till Martin had passed the barrier. "Going down by the express," mused Sladen. "They'll stop it at the Halt, for him. My country, O my country!"

They did: but no car met Martin at the Halt, and he had to come home on foot through a still, grey evening, up the long beech avenue roofed in gloom, while from the fields on either hand came murmurs of the river prattling over shallows, or the slow wrenching and munching of grass by a sleepy cow. Entering by an open window, he had scarcely set foot indoors when he began to wonder if anything had gone wrong: there was always a hush over Laleham Chase, it was no quieter than usual, but there was an uneasy feeling in the air. Sophy, scared and pale, stealing down the stair like a child afraid of a ghost, flew to meet him and break the news. "And, O Martin!" she slipped her hand through his arm, "mother said we were not to be anxious: but she wouldn't let me see him, and she looked worried to death herself."

"Is Somers there still?"

"No, he only stayed a couple of hours."

"Then there can't be any immediate danger. Have they telephoned for a nurse?"

"No: Dr Somers offered to fetch one, but mother cried off for to-night. She means to sit up with him herself. She has such a prejudice against nurses! She won't let me help either, she says I'm not a bit of use in a sick-room, and no more I am, I know it. I've only seen her for a few minutes," said Sophy, looking ready to cry. "She won't have anyone in the room but Dale and Annie." Dale was Lord Laleham's personal servant, and Annie had been nurse to Martin and Sophy some thirty years ago.

"And Trelawney, you say, came by the morning train, and Denis turned up at twelve. How long did their interview last?—An hour! Has Trelawney gone yet?"

"No, he's staying the night. He sent a message that he would be grateful if we could put him up."

"Do you happen to know if he had been sent for?" Sophy shook her head. "What about dinner?" was Martin's next question.

"Dinner? Lee did ask me, but I said never mind. Why, Martin, you don't want dinner now, do you?" Miss Laleham replied with all the naïvete of surprise. Martin glanced at his watch.

"At a quarter past eight? I do, and, if I didn't, don't you imagine Trelawney will? He's in his room, is he? I'll go up and apologize. I'll see mother too, and father if I can, but probably I shan't be let in any more than you: in a hæmorrhage the great thing is to keep quiet. Allowing ten minutes for contingencies, we might say a quarter to nine, that will give me twenty minutes to dress in. Now you had better flit, Sophy, you're always slow and your hair wants doing."

Sophy shrugged her shoulders over the wheelrut ways of men, but all the same she felt more comfortable in her mind. Although it was not in Martin's power to satisfy her anxiety, he had relieved the nerve-fear that lay behind it: fear of the abnormal, that shadow cast by all the mysterious phenomena of the universe, which dogs the steps of man, from the child's fear of darkness to the adult's fear of a darker night in death.

Nevertheless Martin himself was far from easy. He saw Trelawney, and they exchanged a few constrained sentences, but both men were too anxious to be at ease on any terms short of the mutual frankness which loyalty precluded. He was not allowed to see his father. Lady Laleham came out to him and tried to reassure him, but

she was so white and worn that Martin asked if she was keeping anything from him. "About papa's illness? No, my dear, I should never do that," Grace replied. "His chest has always been delicate, and at his age these upsets are not uncommon. He will be well in a few days if we can only keep him quiet." Martin kissed her, but he was not satisfied, for he suspected an evasion. He had barely finished dressing when a servant brought a letter to his room. He glanced at the writing, a small, black, illegible scrawl. "There's no late post to-night—did this come by hand?"

"Yes, sir: Mr Charnwood's groom came round with it this afternoon."

"Ah, thank you," said Martin, laying it down unread. Even when the footman was out of the door he held it for some moments unopened, struggling with the insurrection of his nerves. Yet it was short enough, and contained nothing to make a man of ordinary sensibility tremble as he read it.

Greys, Monday aft.

"DEAR MARTIN:

So v. sorry about your Father. Will you come and see me when you can? On serious business, or I would not ask you now. I will wait in for you. With all our kind regards,

"OLIVE C."

"Hullo, Jane," said Martin after a moment, "what's the matter with you?" The little dog was whimpering at his feet. "Aren't you a sympathetic lady? Well, well, what an ass I am!" He lit a candle and burnt Olive's note. "Come alone now, Jinny, mustn't be late for dinner. Hallo, hallo!" raising both hands, he pressed

them to his temples; the room was spinning round him in throbs of darkness and pain. "Whew! that's not nice: not at all nice, little dog." He lifted her in his arms and leaned his cheek against her head. "I wish I'd stayed in town and could go and get drunk. Can't very well, when you're dining with your sister. What can make me such a fool—I that never was a fool over women?—*Raison pourquoi*, perhaps. How Lawrence would laugh! Can't I hear him—'Love, my dear Martin, like typhoid, should be averted by inoculation.' But there's hardly a fellow I know that would put himself out to this extent, and for a woman that other men . . . O God! other men . . ." The curse of a too keen imagination lay heavy on Martin. Jane gave a sharp yelp, the expression, this time, of personal suffering, and tried to struggle down out of his arms. "Hurting you, am I? Isn't that a shame? Cheer up, come and find a biscuit. After all, this means seeing her again, and tonight. . . ."

Martin had not slept at all for fifty-six hours, and was in that condition when a man goes from a natural to a masked mood as easily as from one room to another. It cost him no effort to dine with Sophy and the lawyer, and exchange the gossip of the Law Courts and Whitehall: and when the meal was over, and Sophy proposed strolling in the garden, it was without a trace of embarrassment that he said he was obliged to go out again for half an hour or so, to pay a call in the village. All things considered, Sophy was surprised; but her mother had sent Annie down to say that Lord Laleham was going on very quietly and would see them in the morning;

and Martin's own manner was so natural that she never gave it a second thought.

And Martin escaped into solitude, into the freshness of the fields, where dew and moonlight glimmered pale between cloud shadow and elm shadow. He followed the main road, which was going to bed, traffic growing rarer, lights coming out in cottage windows; and sober local merrymakers, identifying him in the dimness mainly by his evening dress, gave him a friendly "Good night, sir —good night, Mr. Martin," as he went by. He was very much liked in the village. But he lingered for no conversation to-night. "What's your opinion of this here news, sir?" asked Turner the blacksmith, who had celebrated Bank Holiday by taking his wife for a country walk. "Wait and see," smiled Martin, touching his hat to Mrs Turner. His courtesy was no more than a sleepwalker's automatic response to suggestion. Townley at the War Office, rumours of the Fleet and of the Stock Exchange, a glimpse of his father's head looking frightfully deathlike through a half-open door, dim shade of August woods, grey clouds overhead and grey flints underfoot, all spun before him fragmentary and unreal. Reality? He was going to it. Reality for Martin Laleham that night began and ended in passion.

It was close on ten when he reached Greys, but orders had evidently been given, for he was ushered direct into Olive's sittingroom. It was large and low, and a strip of wall near the window was filled by a great gilt mirror, which reflected in spectral fidelity the grey landscape in its grey stone frame: wide spaces of field and cloud, the chalk range behind the village, one or two yellow lamps,

and the giant scar of a quarry under the hill. Although Olive had come to Greys only on Friday, she had already set her strong mark on the room, for Leigh had sent a packing-case after her. There were no trifling ornaments, but a number of paintings and drawings and three or four shelves of books: a water-colour of Delphine as a child, a profile head of Sladen in which a likeness to Julian came out stronger than in life: some Arequipan sketches drawn by Julian's own vigorous half-trained hand: Cecil Hurst with his eternal clay pipe and flannel shirt, Wright's thin brown face and Lady Margaret blazer, Wandesforde the airman in leather coat and cap: novels of Dostoievsky and Balzac and Anatole France and Moore: Gibbon's *History*, Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, an *Imitatio* and a *Candide*—the books all rather worn, property of a woman of strong prepossessions who read little and re-read much. . . .

The door opened softly and Olive came in: a tall boyish figure, a spirited pale face under its black wreath of hair. Here was reality, here was surcease from pain. "What, have they left you in the dark?" she said in her old friendly voice, and instantly he saw that, from whatever motive she had sent for him, it was not to renew the duel of Saturday night. Amnesty and oblivion were the order of the day. He scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry: there could be no sleep for him till it was fought to an end.

"How is your father?—Hæmorrhage? I never like the sound of that. And I've dragged you away to come and see me?"

"I did not mind," said Martin truthfully. "There is no immediate danger; none at all, my mother says, so

long as he keeps quiet. I hope I'm not too late for you? I've been in town all day and never had your note till after eight o'clock, or I should have come round sooner, of course."

"I rarely go to bed before twelve. But you—aren't you tired?"

"Tired, no—it takes more than a day in town to tire me. What do you suppose?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Olive vaguely. "I never think you look very strong." Surprise mingled with gratification kept Martin silent: who would have dreamed that Olive noticed his looks? "You look fagged out now. Sit down: I dare say you've been on your feet most of the time. Take this chair, it's Julian's, by which I mean that it has lots of elbow-room and a double allowance of cushions." Martin dropped into it, smiling, and shut his eyes. This was more than surcease from pain—this was happiness. In spite of all, Olive was already exercising her old tranquillising influence over him, and strangely, imperceptibly, his darker memories of her were being washed away. Her very surroundings soothed him: the rich bare room, the solitary bowl of heliotrope, the dimness of candleshine, her dress of black gauze, the dull satin of her shoes, the absence of flashing ornament on her breast or in her hair: her melancholy grace of voice and movement, the mysterious light in her eyes which touched him like a caress. . . .

"Wouldn't you like some coffee?"

"No, it's after ten o'clock, Littledale will have gone to bed."

"But I can get it for you—" She had sprung up, but he barred her way, smiling, with outstretched arm.

"No, really no, thanks, coffee keeps me awake. But what a maternal spirit you are, Olive! My mother swears there are no domesticated women left, but you, I believe, are never happier than when you're cooking a meal for one of your men or mending his clothes."

"Aren't you sleeping well now?"

"Er—no," said Martin, cornered, and suffering from the family inability to tell a lie. "Insomnia is an old friend of mine. But don't give me away, will you. I couldn't stand a fuss. Now tell me why you sent for me. I ought not to leave Sophy too long, she goes to pieces when she's nervous. You aren't frightened of me, are you? I'm not a bit alarming. Is it anything about Julian?"

"Poor Julian! No, he's quite competent to manage his own affairs." Olive smiled in spite of herself. Like Sladen, she had divined a tragedy from the state of Julian's temper: but—also like Sladen—she was unable to take a grave view of Julian's tragedy. "No, it's about yourself. I'm not the proper person to tell you, but apparently no one else will, and it's not fair for you to be left in a false position."

"Am I in a false position?"

"Yes."

Martin raised his dark unsatisfied eyes. "Is it about Denis? Do speak out, if you know: I'd have given anything to get to the end of it long ago. It's a wretched business."

"Where are you in it now?"

"Where I was in March. What happened to-day? Sophy tells me Denis came up and was interviewed by Trelawney, a tremendously formal affair: but I, you see,

was out of the way. I may say I was packed off, for I'm sure my father had this in mind when he sent me up to town. But I'm not a child, to be kept in the dark. I had planned to waylay my mother: but I'd rather hear the truth, if it's painful, from you."

"Why?"

"Naturally: because whatever you say to me I only hear your voice."

Olive rose and extinguished the candles. There was now no light in the room except a faint glow of moonshine. Passing behind Martin, she leant for a moment over his chair, so near to him that the sprig of heliotrope tucked into her bodice brushed against his hair, and by its vagrant sweetness he became aware of her proximity. "I'm sorry to have to hurt you, Martin."

"Yes, dear, yes."

Then she perceived that he was answering at random and had not heard what she said. Personal vanity was dead in Olive, but against the insidious sweetness of this discovery she had no defence, it took her breath away, and gently, almost unconsciously, she put her arms round his neck and kissed his cheek . . . a moment later she had slipped away to the windowsill, while Martin, on his feet and deeply flushed, moved forward as though to force a conclusion for which she would have had only her own imprudence to blame. But she drew back.

"Denis is your brother."

"Thanks. Denis can wait."

"But legitimate."

"What!" Martin stopped short. "Absurd: it's impossible."

"Your elder brother: the child of the first Lady Laleham—the child that was said to have died."

"Elder, and legitimate? But at that rate he's the heir to the title!"

"Yes, he has everything and you nothing: that's why your father would sooner die than acknowledge him."

"Whew!" said Martin softly whistling: "is that all?"

CHAPTER XXII

And that is what happens when one of those who love us makes every sacrifice to blind us, and another steels every nerve to open our eyes. "Is that *all?*" Martin repeated. "How I have misjudged my father! Good heavens, what is there in that? It's the greatest relief to me!"

Olive would have liked to laugh: oh, how like Martin!

If ever Viola Laleham revisited the glimpses of the moon, she would have been grateful to her stepson, for he and he alone understood her at a breath. Even over the singular behaviour of Edward Delahay Martin merely nodded his head with a touch of sheer literary satisfaction. "Yes," he said, "that's what that little beggar *would* have done. From his portrait I can imagine him fastening with warped tenacity on the other man's son. As for my father, he'd fight their claim so long as he lived. Apart from my own position, the mere touching of that old wound would be agony to him. He was crazed about my stepmother." Like most children, Martin found it hard to enter sympathetically into the romance of a parent. "But how long have you known all this?"

"Only to-day. Denis came in soon after one o'clock, while I was darning Delphine's stockings on the lawn, and poured it all out to me. He was very diffident. 'I ought not to give it up,' he said, 'but I *can't* go on. I should feel like a murderer. After all, it was my mother

that did the wrong. What began with her ends with me.' Then . . ."

"Go on, dear."

"Well—since you're his brother . . . I put my arm round his neck and he leant his head down on my shoulder and gave two or three deep sobs. Then he pushed me away and stood up and said 'That's all over.' After that he thanked me for having been his friend, and kissed me, and left me."

"Where is he now?"

"In town. The Countisford people told him he would stand a better chance of getting into your regiment if he applied direct to headquarters, so he went off by the two o'clock train en route for Buckingham Gate."

"But, good heavens! he can't enlist as a private——"

"That is what Mr Trelawney said. He came in twenty minutes after Denis left, in a state of heat and agitation which I should imagine to be rare in him. We pooled our news and Julian ran down to the post office and wired to Sladen to waylay Denis at Waterloo. He is shrewd, my poor Sladen, and fond of Denis too: he won't let him slip."

"You think of everything!" Martin, who had sprung up, sat down again, not sorry to be relieved from the necessity for immediate action. "But what a bore it is —what an infernal nuisance!" He gave a little fastidious shiver. "I foresee endless wrangling and jangling with my father. He hasn't a grain of common sense. Thank heaven, they can't have burnt the letters: he collapsed directly after Denis left, and Trelawney would know better than to touch them. Heavens, what should

I have done if they had been burnt? I might have had to keep the title! Insupportable . . ."

"Certainly you and Denis are brothers," Olive murmured, "for you look at things in exactly the same unworldly way, as no other man would ever do. *Vaya con Dios, hombre!* you aren't going to tell me that you like the prospect of remaining plain Martin Laleham to your life's end on a second son's allowance of eight hundred a year, while Denis fills your shoes at Laleham Chase?"

"Certainly I should prefer it," Martin answered rather haughtily, "since Laleham was never mine."

He dropped into a silence which Olive did not care to break. Her heart was singing for joy, and yet she could hardly keep the tears from her eyes. Oh unpractical, romantic Martin, not one murmur of natural regret? No, not one! Strangely out of place in a commercial era, he kept his mediæval "chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound"; and in later years, when Olive caught herself wishing him different in this point or that—less indolent or more ambitious, slower to criticise or swifter to act—she turned to her memory of that night at Greys as to an ever-springing well of love and pride. No man can be expected to live at the level of a woman's ideal of him; it is enough for her happiness if there has been an hour when he fulfilled it.

It was not as if he were unhurt. However smooth the veneer of trained manner, Olive knew him too well to be misled. He had no wish to sit in the House of Lords or to have the spending of a big income—it was one of life's ironies that Lord Laleham had soiled his fingers to fix his

son in a career which had always faintly bored him—but the love of Laleham was in his bones and in his blood: touch that, and one touched a nerve which would never cease to ache. And yet even of Laleham he stripped himself without repining: a stoic on the point of honour, Martin disdained to envy or even to regret what was not his own.

The moon, not long risen, shone out of a smudge of cloud, her reflection in the grey mirror hanging broad and red like a Japanese lantern. At length Martin rose and strolled over to the hearth, throwing back his shoulders like a man coming to a determination. He was now no more than a shadow, while Olive, sitting sideways on the windowledge, was suffused in a bloom of moonlight.

"What right had you to reveal this secret, Olive?"

"I never gave Denis any promise. He bound Julian over, because Julian was stormy, and militant—he has the fighting instinct strongly developed, and he objects on principle to mixing up sentiment and business. But Denis took me for granted. Perhaps," Olive added slowly, "I was the more bound, for being left free, but I did what I thought right. I'd have warned him, but he gave me no chance, he was gone in a moment; then there were the letters to save. I had to think for you. It was all such a tangle. High time, it seemed to me, for some cool disinterested hand to come in and cut the knot."

"You thought of me—but wasn't Denis thinking of me?"

"Of you, but not for you. It was most generous and unselfish of him to leave you in the dark, but most un-

fair. A man has a right to choose what obligations he will or will not lie under to another man."

"Brothers are brothers," said Martin smiling. "I am not proud, and when Denis rules at Laleham I shan't at all mind pocketing a handsome allowance. But that's by the way, and on the main issue I can never be sufficiently grateful to you. Denis was strangely blind. My father too—he was equally inconsiderate."

"Ah! do fathers ever realise that their children are grown up?"

"My father is very fond of me, and would not stick at a mild felony to profit me, but neither he nor Denis made the slightest effort to look through my eyes. Only you did that. Olive, you love me."

He waited a moment: when no reply came, he went on in the same quiet, conversational tone.

"Dear Olive, no woman, I am sure, thinks for a man, as you call it, as you thought for me, unless she loves him. If what you felt were only friendship, loyalty to Denis and pity for my father and uncertainty of all the unknown factors would have stayed your hand. When a woman so cares for a man that she can't bear him to be in another man's debt, it is love. And you do love me; don't you?"

Her profile was so still that it might have been carved in ivory: a light frost of constraint seemed to have fallen on her limbs.

"It's no good, dear, you can't escape me now. I always had some instinct of this, and that's why I went on worrying you. Oh, Olive! haven't you put me off long enough? Why are you so cruel to me?"

"I, cruel?"

"Very. Here I stand, patient as an old horse in the shafts: do you think I'm as placid and spiritless as I look? . . . Must I talk to you from half across the room? Mayn't I come nearer? . . . Anyone would say you were afraid of me! I'm only a younger son now, and I'm very diffident too, like Denis: see, I'm kneeling at your feet—you were sorry for Denis, aren't you sorry for me?"

"It is you who were cruel: that night in the cedar wood."

"I don't care a straw," said Martin fiercely: "you deserved it, and more. Oh, what does it signify, when you're going to be my wife? Say it, say it, don't madden me like this!" Passion is a strong fever: a week's illness would not have worked a greater change in Martin Laleham's features. "How dare you reproach me?" he broke out angrily, stammering and shaken. "You must have known what you were doing when before me and before that fellow Wright . . . I think of you all day, I never cease desiring you, I lie half the night . . . I did not care if my father died to-night, I was too glad to come to you, to be with you even for an hour—one hour saved out of all the thousands that I can't be with you. Speak to me—you can't condemn a man to death without giving him some reason! What have I done? Haven't I been faithful, and docile, and abject?—But that's not it, no: you love me, and it's for my sake that you've kept me these three years on the rack: because you're not rich enough, or not sufficiently respectable, or possibly because I should blush to acknowledge Sladen and Walter as my brothers-in-law. Is that it? Or is there some twopenny-halfpenny indiscretion in your own

life that you're ashamed to confess to me? Oh yes, I recollect now, you are not innocent, are you? Good God, how childish women are!—My spotless Olive! as if any man could kneel here at your feet and not read in your eyes that you're 'chaster than the icicle that hangs on Dian's temple'?"

"Martin——"

"Say you love me," said Martin, holding out his arms.

"Yes, I love you," said Olive solemnly.

But she held him away. "No, my darling, don't touch me: or only my hands if you like, while I find courage to give you your answer, since you must have it. I ought to have done it before, but it's a sacrifice that any woman might shrink from, and . . . men fall in and out of love so readily."

"Some men."

"Almost all. Now you must face a shock, since you won't let me spare you. But don't watch me, don't make it harder for me. . . . These three times that I've refused you, did I do it for my own pleasure? Oh no! believe me, it was not easy. You never have understood me, because you've always thought I was letting small considerations of the difference between us, in money and social position, stand in my way. I should not have done that. No, I'm not sentimental—I'm French enough by upbringing to agree that a marriage, to be safe, ought to be suitable, and that it's a heavy handicap when the giving is all on one side. Yet exceptions aren't uncommon, and you're one of them: a *rêveur*, one of those detached, unworldly natures that know how to give, and forget. Oh, I trust you, Martin! but there's more than that between us, and it's precisely because you have the

temperament of a poet"—Martin started—"yes, my darling, there is in you something exacting and dissatisfied; and that's why I've refused you for so long."

"You're not married already, are you?"

"No."

"This prelude—! You're frightening me. But there could be nothing else that I should admit as a bar, and I'm not even sure that I should admit that."

"I can't give you innocence. I haven't it to give. I came to grief when I was very young."

So the blow fell: and in spite of all it found Martin unprepared. He sat down by the table, one hand shading his eyes: but under it he continued to watch Olive's reflection in the mirror, a beautiful dim figure bathed in moonlight and mysteriously surrounded by a shadowy landscape. The night was so quiet that they could hear the tumbling murmur of water through a weir by the mill, and the alarm-cry of an engine before it plunged into a cutting among the downs. In the reflection of a cottage far off by the quarry a reflected lamp winked and went out.

> Chaste as the icicle
> That's curded by the frost from purest snow
> And hangs on Dian's temple . . .

If she was not chaste there was no such thing as chastity on earth: and savagely recollecting nights when he had whipped his thoughts off her like hounds, because even in imagination he would not allow them to profane her, Martin drily resolved to be less maidenly in future. Or, if it came to that, why only in imagination? What a

farce, when the man is more modest than the lady! "If others, why not I?"

"No."

"Did I speak aloud? I beg your pardon. It was too bluntly put. But——"

"Never. It's all over long ago. Oh, how unjust you are, Martin! one moment I'm spotless—which few women are—and then I don't deserve even as much respect as a girl of the street. Dreamer! life isn't like that."

"Oh, you must forgive me, for there you wrong me. I'm sure you are much better than a girl of the street."

His suave and melancholy irony finished the destruction of Olive's pride. This she had foreseen, and yet perhaps not fully realised, for she felt such shame that not even Martin, in the cancerous preoccupation of retrospective jealousy, could remain blind to it. He looked hard at her, and his manner changed, its cold cruelty dying into a profound sadness of disillusion and regret.

"It is true, I am unjust: after all, what right have I to throw stones at you? But in that we're all unjust, we expect so much more than we ever dream of giving. But answer me one question first, it is what is killing me: have you had more than one lover?"

"No, only one."

"And it was long ago? . . . I'm sorry if I wound you, but may I know the circumstances?"

"Yes, fully: or you might think lightly of other women for my sake."

Martin started, but kept silence, and after a moment Olive went on, her voice firm now and her manner collected.

"It was when I was nineteen, the year after Julian

went to America. Leigh, Sladen, Delphine, and I were living in rooms in Monte Carlo. Delphine was a mere child, of course, Leigh had work in an engineering shop, Sladen was picking up a living, I hardly know how. He was only seventeen, but he passed for three or four and twenty: he was always one of those men who might be any age. Then Leigh got the offer of a post in a larger provincial branch and had to go off to Clermont Ferrand. We were to join him later. Meanwhile there wasn't much money going, for Leigh had to keep himself as well as us. . . . There was a man—Patru, of the Café Maritime. . . . Sladen brought him to the flat because he was fond of écarté and a bad player. Sladen won money of him and gave it to me, and I took it—for Delphine. Milk, and clothes, and good fruit: children cost so much, and they so easily fall ill. I could not write to Leigh because I knew he was starving himself already. At last Patru offered to put me on for a little dancing turn. I took the job."

"And this man bullied you and you submitted to him."

"No: I should never have done that."

"What, then?"

"He asked us to dine with him one night in his villa at Cap Martin: we were to motor out with him in his car. I had to humour him for Sladen's sake. We reached the house, it stood alone in a little wood of *pins maritimes:* it seemed very dark and quiet, but inside it was all luxury and electric light. Dinner was served in a glass dining-room overlooking the coast, that dark Mediterranean coast with its glittering towns lying along it like a necklace. There was another woman for Sladen, a Paris girl that I never saw before or since: she had her part to play

and brilliantly she played it. You must remember that he was only seventeen. With the dessert all the lamps were put out and we sat in the dark, and one of the waiters went round with a tiny electric torch to serve the wines and liqueurs. I drank soda water, but Sladen for once in his life lost his head: anis and champagne cup was his final undoing. It was a mixture that presented no attractions to me, and I can't imagine that Sladen would have liked it if the French girl had not made him drink out of her glass. Before midnight he was drunk."

"Acting as your escort."

"I do not defend Sladen. The French girl laughed, but Patru was grave and apologetic. She and Patru between them put him on a sofa. Then Patru turned to me and suggested that I should let him drive me home, leaving Sladen to recover at his leisure. I had but one desire, which was to get away from the Villa Beau-Soleil. We went to fetch my wraps, which I had taken off upstairs. He opened the door for me, and when I had passed through he followed me in and locked it. I knew all, then."

"Did you defend yourself?"

"He was tall and strong: a stout man, with curly hair. I did what I could. I . . . We were alone in the villa except for the wine waiter and the French girl, the window overlooked the pinewood, the persiennes were shut. He was not amenable to . . . entreaty . . . and . . . resistance was the salt of the adventure."

"You were defeated?"

"He kept me there all night."

"Unconsenting to the end."

"Dear Martin, if I had been out for amorous distrac-

tions, Patru was not the type I should have chosen. When the—the end came, it was very early morning; such an exquisite dawn it was, I can see it now, coloured all over with an iridescence of rose and lilac like the inside of a shell . . . He told me to get out of the house and hold my tongue. If I made a fuss he would deny . . . assert . . . bring the inevitable counter-charge. The morals of a dancer from the Maritime! He would swear I was trying to blackmail him, the French girl would bear him out, and there would be Sladen to explain away, dead drunk, a compromising escort. But if I was *sage, gentille,* there would be a fat little roll of notes for a good girl."

"He offered you money?"

"I went home on foot and slipped in unseen while the concierge was squabbling with the milkman. Delphine was asleep, in her little bed near mine: she always sleeps all night. I went to bed too. Sladen returned soon after breakfast, exceedingly ashamed of himself, but defiant, as he always is in those circumstances, and fortunately unsuspicious. The French girl had said that Patru drove me home. I never told him, or anyone. I could have told Julian, but no one else. Leigh at eighteen was not up to Patru's weight, and Sladen would have shot himself. I wrote to Leigh that a man had been making himself difficult, and he found a room for Del and me in Clermont and we lived with him there."

"Is Patru still alive?"

"No, he died— My darling, what is it?"

"I should have liked to have the shooting of him," said Martin. He put up his hand over his eyes. "What on earth is the matter with me? I can't see a thing through

this—mist, is it? but it's red. . . . If only Patru were still in the land of the living . . ." He did not know what he was saying: he had been seized by one of those transports of anger that strike a man blind and deaf unless they can be translated into action. Olive dared not go near him.

Ouvre-moi ta porte
Pour l'amour de Dieu . . .

What shall Pierrette do if the door remains closed? But before long the habit of self-control began to reassert itself.

". . . Olive, I am sorry if I hurt you, but my mind is a blank. What has happened to me?"

"Only a very bad shock," Olive smiled at him, though her lips were ashy pale. "You'll be yourself again directly. Shall I get you that coffee now, or would you prefer a stronger dose? There's some liqueur brandy in the other room that Julian would recommend——"

"Drop that," said Martin roughly. "I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to be rude. But you're so d——d calm. I didn't mean to swear at you either." He had to crush down an inclination to laugh. "It's your own fault, dear, you frightened the life out of me. Why did you tell me you had had a lover? A lover—that swine off his dunghill routing among the lilies!"

"Thank you. But the lily was broken."

"Nonsense. No man worth his salt would let that one night linger in his mind. What is there in it, after all? You were spotless: and Patru's dead. The thing is a nightmare, and you told it—too vividly. Give me twelve hours and I shall—I shall forget." But he was growing

whiter and whiter and instead of taking Olive in his arms he had increased his distance from her. "You can't imagine that that one night, your night of martyrdom—a thing over and done with long ago, and for which you were no more responsible and no more stained by it than if he had spat at you in the street—you can't have thought that it would stand in the way of any man who loved you? Why didn't you tell me of it three years ago? We should have been old married people by now. We shall be, three years hence."

"Never. I shall never marry you."

"Why not?"

"Because you no longer wish to marry me."

"You're mad. No man——"

Olive smiled. "I've known men that would take advantage of it to propose different terms. Don't be angry, it takes all sorts to make a world: on my word I believe I know more of the gutter side of life than you do! Many men would marry me in spite of it and be happy. You, unfortunately, are of a more fastidious temper. I was sure of it all along, and now I see I was right. You're one of those who don't care for fruit without the bloom on it. You would always be a difficult lover, because you idealise where you love. If you had met me before Julian went to America I believe I could have satisfied you, for when I was seventeen I was a very beautiful young girl and very innocent; and that would have been an exquisite happiness, a marriage such as there are few of; but we should never be happy now. Not that you would remind me! but you would never forget: and I should see you remembering, and it would kill me. No, that's a romantic fiction: one doesn't die, one lives

on, but love dies—everything fresh and beautiful in it is degraded. After all, no one has a right to happiness! Accept the issue, dear. You and I are not made to be happy."

"That is taking the sword to one's heart."

"I took it to mine long ago. It hurts less when one's used to it. Believe me, one grows used to everything, except sin. Renunciation, that's the word. But I renounce you for this life only. Come to me in the next."

"Is there a next life? Oh! yes," said Martin with sparkling eyes: "there must be one, for Patru."

"Why not a heaven for you and me, then? . . . Give me your hands: kiss me." She drew his head down and would have touched his forehead, but Martin in another flash of reviving vigour kissed her lips. "I cannot let you go," he said.

"I can send you away," said Olive. "It's better to bear this now, a clean wound, than to let it fester. Think of me as if I were dead: I am dead to you, after to-night. Courage! there's plenty of work before you. You're going to rejoin your old regiment, aren't you?" By touch after touch she was drawing him back from the dangerous borderland of despair into a dark and stern but habitable reality. "Cecil Hurst swears you'll all be out of England in a fortnight."

"True," said Martin with his indefinable irony, "and I shall soon forget you in the joy of war."

"Hush! No more now—I can't stand it any more than you can. Listen, is that eleven striking? I had no idea it was so late. Go, my darling: Sophy won't like to go to bed till you come in. Give her all our love

and sympathy: and then do you go to bed too and try to get some sleep. When you see Dr Somers, get him to mix you a draught. Insomnia plays the devil with one's nerves: that's partly why yours are all on edge and why it all seems such a nightmare."

Martin laughed, preparing to step out over the windowsill. "No, it's not. Forgive me for contradicting you. It is because you are the most spotless and noble woman I have ever known, and yet, though I would sell my soul to marry you, I'm made of such thin blood that I believe I shall be obliged to decline the honour: because I'd die to serve you and I shall never come near you again without seeing that swine's body between us: because I'm a poet and not a man"—He turned suddenly and seized her in his arms. "By heaven, I will not let you go! Since fighting's the order of the day, I'll fight my own ghosts first. I'll drill myself not to be afraid of life: death I never was afraid of. And when I come home, Olive, you shall be married to none of your damned poets, but a man like other men, strong enough to hold you against all the ghosts in Christendom——"

His voice died on her lips, and for the first time there fell on this hard-driven pair the consolation of mutual surrender. Did she believe him? She never knew. *Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment,* but during that moment it is hard to remain a sceptic or a philosopher. For these two the time was very short. Light hurried steps were audible on the gravel outside: a bell rang loudly: a door opened, persons moved in the hall, a voice —Julian's—uttered a cry of surprise. Olive started. "Listen, Martin! who is that?"

"What do I care?" said Martin. But there came a

knock at their own door. "Olive, are you there? Is Martin with you?"

"Come in," said Olive, and in broke Julian, pale and agitated.

"Here's Sophy," he said without preface.

Sophy followed on his heels: Sophy in her dark velvet, its hem wet with dew, and not even a scarf thrown over her bare shoulders. She had been running, and crying as she ran, and she was still out of breath and sobbing at intervals. "Oh, there you are at last, Martin! oh, Olive, how could you keep him?"

"Has anyone wanted me?" said Martin with rather more than his habitual calm. "You should not have come yourself, you should have sent a servant."

"A servant?—no, I was too ashamed."

"Martin, can't you see—?" said Julian hastily.

Martin's face altered. "Not my father?"

"Oh, Martin, he died twenty minutes ago!"

"Somers said there was no danger——"

"He is dead. We thought there was no danger, but he's dead," said Sophy. "He woke up soon after ten and began worrying mother to send for Mr Trelawney. He was light-headed: I heard him from my room, and I crept out and listened at the door. Mother tried to quiet him, but in the end Mr Trelawney had to be brought. Then it was all about papers that Trelawney had to burn. He said 'Wait till to-morrow,' but father cried out 'No, now, to-night.' Then Mr Trelawney grew frightened and promised to get them, and coming out in a hurry he ran into me and said 'Send your brother and Dr Somers.' But mother had already telephoned for Somers and I couldn't find you anywhere.

"I came into the room, no one spoke to me: mother and Annie were trying to make father lie down and Mr Trelawney stood by the bed with an envelope in his hand. He said 'It's a crime, my lord,' but father cried out 'Burn them, burn them.' Annie said 'He'll kill himself.' Trelawney turned to mother and she said 'Denis would wish it,' and Trelawney said 'I wash my hands of it,' and opening the envelope he put the papers on the bed while he went to light a candle. I heard father whisper 'I never thought to see *that* writing again,' and he pushed them away. But when Trelawney picked them up one in a different writing fell out and fluttered down on the sheet. It was on foreign paper, and brown, as if it were very old: and it was in a faded, feeble writing, one of those delicate sloping hands——"

"A woman's hand?"

"Oh, how did you guess? Yes, our stepmother's. Father gave a great cry of 'Viola!' and then a horrible little cough, and the—the bleeding broke out again: the sheet was drenched, and the letter. He never spoke after that except once to mother, and once 'Martin! Martin!' "

"And I not there!" said Martin under his breath.

So the wheel was come full circle: the heirship of Laleham was settled for ever: there was blood on Denis's most innocent hands.

"I'll get the car out," said Julian, prompt and practical, "it'll be quicker than walking. Sit down, my darling." He put his arm round Sophy, and Sophy in a very natural manner leant her head on his shoulder. In front of this bitter grief, their small misunderstand-

ing dwindled to the proportions of a nursery quarrel, which had no power to keep them apart.

"Thanks, Julian, but I'll cut across the fields," said Martin, rousing himself out of deep abstraction. "If you'll bring Sophy—she seems hardly fit to walk."

He made Julian, even at that moment, flush like a boy. "If she'll trust herself to me."

"Oh, she will," said Martin drily. "Till to-morrow morning, Olive." He smiled into her eyes as he stepped out over the windowsill. Lord Laleham had then been dead not more than five and twenty minutes; but youth will be served.

Indeed it seemed to Martin that the bitterest sting of all was the impossibility of not feeling a sense of relief. Sophy, Denis, himself, they had all sinned against their filial duty, with the kindest intentions in the world Lord Laleham would have made them all suffer for it, and now all these knots were cut by his death: and yet they had all loved him, and Martin in particular had been a pattern of sons. He had nothing to reproach himself with . . . except that he was glad of his father's death.

He was almost afraid to face his mother with such treasons in his mind, but Lady Laleham heard his step and called to him, and turning into the library he found her sitting alone by the hearth in her favourite chair, as he had seen her sitting a thousand times before, but with his father in the chair opposite.

"Mother, I shall never cease to regret that I wasn't there."

"Never mind, my dear, he wouldn't have known you. He didn't know anyone from the time the hæmorrhage came on again."

Martin stooped and kissed the strong, calm, highbred face turned up to him. "But you ought not to have been left alone. Mother, I know everything now. I can't discuss it yet—there'll be many letters to write, and I must see Trelawney. But there's one act of simple justice that must be done first." Lady Laleham sat silent: her ear, attuned to the bitter harmonies of life, detected an unconscious alteration in his manner, though she was too wise to take account of it. Yet it is hard for the queen regnant to become even the most loved and honoured of queens dowager. "With your permission," said Martin, "I'm going to send for Denis."

Grace uttered a deep, involuntary sigh. Much as she pitied Denis, she was but human, and to watch her own son strip himself of his birthright was painful. But she was too wise, far too deeply wise to oppose him. "Yes, do, my dear: he should not be left to learn such news from the morning papers. Besides, his place is here."

She followed Martin to the telephone room. He had taken the number of Sladen's rooms in Agar Street and fortunately they had not long to wait.

"Hallo—is that you, Charnwood? Martin Laleham speaking, from Laleham. Is Denis with you?

"Ask him to speak to me for a moment.

"Is that you, Denis?—Will you come home the first thing to-morrow morning? I know all now. Olive told me.

"Don't say that. She did right, and I can never thank her enough. But that's not all. You had Julian's second wire about father's illness? There's bad news, old man.

"Yes, he died half an hour ago.

"No, it isn't so, I swear it. No, Denis, no: there was no quarrel, it was neither you nor I that was responsible. My mother is listening and bids me tell you it's your duty to come: your place is here.

"No, on my honour, it was no shadow of fault of yours. Whose? Call it your mother's. Thirty years are not so long, are they? Her hand touched him, and he died."

Martin's face worked as he put up the receiver. His eyes met Lady Laleham's, and for a moment she had him in her arms, his face hidden on her shoulder. "Everything he most hated" . . . Martin muttered.

"It can't be helped, my dear," said Lady Laleham. "You've been the best of sons. . . . My own boy, it's always the old folk that suffer most in a quarrel of this kind, and it's they who have to go to the wall: you'll know how true that is when you have sons and daughters of your own."

CHAPTER XXIII

". . . but cheer up, sir, the men'll be round in an hour or two, as soon as it gets a bit dark."

An hour or two, and the shadows still from the south! Martin Laleham, who had been lying out in a summer sunshine since a local attack at dawn, was not much consoled by so remote a prospect of deliverance. But he nodded with a grateful smile to Hilton disappearing wormlike through the grass, which in this spot was growing high and had flowers in it, poppies and clover and ragged robin, the wild growth that springs up in an unmown hayfield. For a long while past there had been little or no fighting here, and a spell of showery weather had done its best to heal the scars of war, till they were torn open by to-day's raid in the midst of dawn, when a strip of trench was taken—only to be evacuated again before noon. The to and fro of Western warfare! The hay was smashed and trampled now, and yet even now, the ground sloping unevenly in tilts and dimpled hollows that partly hid one line of wire entanglements from the other, there was enough cover left to give Hilton, crawling on a guesswork course at the rate of thirty yards an hour, a fair sporting chance: and he cast a look of compassion on the man he was obliged to leave to his fate: in the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king.

Martin's own horizon was bounded this way and that by the lip of one of these small upland depressions, the shape and not much more than the size of a saucer. He had an idea that before the war they must have been

gravel pits, which was a pleasant, homely thought; and when Hilton had vanished he turned over with a sigh of resignation, nestling his head in among the long grasses as a child in bed nestles down on a pillow; the movements of a badly wounded man, in their weakness and weariness, are often very like the movements of a tired child.

But he was soon roused again by a rustling nearer at hand. Succour? The keen hope died as soon as it was born. Another man, wounded no doubt like Hilton, was dragging along to his side. Martin felt for his revolver, but his hand fell away as he recognised the familiar dress. An officer, this. And he gazed apathetically at the approaching form, which trailed itself along by its elbows, flat on its belly like a snake, and slower than Hilton; what did it want? A drink? Martin had drunk a little, and, to his anguish, spilt the remainder of his water from hands too faint to hold it. Help? He wondered if he could adjust another man's dressing. Companionship? Most likely that and that only: some poor wretch, cowed by the immense loneliness of death, wished to pass out with another hand clasping his own. . . . Dragging himself close to Martin the stranger lay exhausted, turning his head sideways between his arms, the features steel-coloured and distorted, the eyelids closed. Martin stretched out his unhurt arm and laid it over those languid shoulders. They were strangers no longer, but brothers borne down by the same arbitrary fate and sinking under the same distress. But the newcomer opened his black eyes and stared at Martin with a twisted grin which suddenly and strangely became familiar—familiar from years before the war, if such years had ever been—who on earth was it?

"Hallo, Martin Laleham! don't you know me?"

"Why, it's Sladen Charnwood!"

Night, and a starry Mediterranean seaboard, and a drunken boy asleep on a girl's knees . . .

Never in his life had Sladen's company been grateful to Martin, nor was it now: dark as they were, he would have preferred the solitude of his own forebodings. Yet Sladen was Olive's brother and she loved him.

"Can I help you—are you much hurt?"

"H'm. . . . Got a pain in my sash. But they won't send me home for it, you bet."

From weakness or from caution both voices were no more than a thread of broken breath. But Sladen's features were gradually becoming more composed, though their ghastly tint remained unaltered. With a great effort he sat up, or half sat up, keeping his head low and turning his back on Martin: the latter was conscious of a distinct pang of jealousy: *he* couldn't sit up. Having no further observations to make Martin shut his eyes again. But he was soon recalled from semi-consciousness by Sladen, who had screwed himself round into a convenient attitude and was holding water to his lips.

"Oh heavens!" Martin murmured. It was lukewarm and there was not much of it, but the first mouthful was sweeter than the Widow fresh from her ice, it seemed to pass into every vein and over every nerve as if life itself were flowing back into his broken frame. But soon he put it from him: "Enough—keep the rest for yourself—I won't drink it all.

"I've had plenty. Still we'll keep a drop, lest perchance it should be more than an hour or two before the

Rosicrucians get round to us. I heard what your serjeant said. I was pretty close. I saw you fall a minute after I did, and I crawled about looking for you, but I couldn't find you. . . . Funny it seems to be lying in a hayfield. An anach—anachronism of war. Who'd believe it? Or a lark singing between the lines. What have hayfields to do with shrapnel? But these lovely little flowers. . . . Your men and our men are all over here, I passed eight or ten of yours while I was looking for you. Your battalion was pretty badly cut up. Pity we couldn't hold the trench." But no words could have expressed Martin's indifference to the fate of the trench. Sladen smiled. "Professional v. amateur. . . . Where are you wounded? Whew! what a mess you're in!"

"A smashed knee: and my right wrist is broken too—but are you fit to be moving about?"

"Oh, you shut up, don't come the Philip Sidney over me," murmured Sladen lightly. He was cutting away Martin's trouser as he spoke and ripping the field dressing from his coat. "H'm . . . the bleeding has stopped, I won't meddle with it much." He bound up the wound, deftly but very slowly: all his movements were deliberate and slow and precise, as precise as those of an old maid at her tatting. "Now the wrist."

"Why, you're as good as the M.O.," said Martin, smiling as he resigned his broken arm to Sladen's touch, a touch which scarcely hurt him, Sladen was so deft over it, and so neat, but slower and slower.

"Like a mouthful of brandy? . . . You'll get on for a bit now," and Sladen sank back into his prone attitude. A teasing attitude to watch, Martin found it: his legs

and body from the waist down trailing all along on the ground like the rear of a caterpillar. But he was uninjured above the middle, and crossing his arms and laying his cheek upon them, so that his head with its nightmare colouring and its dilated black eyes was close to Martin's ear, he ran on in his slow drawl, "Nix on opium, if I were you. In this high grass, when it gets to be night, they'll never find you unless you signal."

Weak from pain and loss of blood, Martin was nevertheless beginning to mend, and a symptom of revival was the rebirth of curiosity, the first of emotions to become dormant in a wounded man: and he had begun to be perplexed by Sladen—the deathlike tint, the crushed attitude, the hard, collected voice. He was too active and far too fluent to be seriously injured, and yet . . .

"I say, I feel ever so much better. I'm exceedingly grateful to you. But aren't you pretty badly hurt yourself? Turn over and let's have a look at you. I'm not much use with this cursed wrist of mine, but I'll do my best." His manner was stiff under the strain of pretending to be cordial: he never had liked Sladen, whose affectation set his teeth on edge, and now there was this terrible fresh score unsettled between them. . . . It seemed inappropriate that the animosities of peace should flourish so persistently in the soil of war, yet persist they did, though Sladen had cared for him so tenderly and he could not but admire Sladen's courage. The organ-grinder grinned again with the old irritating irony, he had always been quick at reading other men's minds.

"Shan't turn over. I've had all the exercise I want. Anyhow I'm all right, I and another fellow tied each other up. The subject bores me, let us speak of other

things." Since his services were not required Martin would have preferred to be silent, the brandy had made him sleepy and inclined to doze, but Sladen ran on as if he were a clock wound up to go for a certain length of time, though now and again a sentence faded out. "It's years since I've seen you. Curious, isn't it, how one can live for twenty years—no—live for years out here within twenty miles of each other and never—? I haven't seen Julian since that famous Sunday at Greys, we missed each other on leave. But he wrote to congratulate me when I got my commission. 1915 that was, while he was still in training at Aldershot and—" Without warning his voice died as though he were going to swoon. Imposing his will on it he held it to its cold level again. "Heard from Denis lately?"

"I saw him at the base hospital in May."

"Did you? Dear old Denis! What was he like?"

Martin stifled a yawn. Tired as he was, Sladen's insatiable eyes dragged an answer out of him. "He had nine splinter-wounds on him, but he was hugging a stray kitten and very pleased at the prospect of being sent home."

"Pleased . . . yes . . . they don't understand, these others, they don't begin to understand. Year in year out, the flies in summer and the swamps in winter and the everlasting racket of the everlasting guns . . . ten years hence they'll begin to wonder how we stuck it out. How did we? I don't know. God, oh, God! those poppies smell of dead men, everything smells of dead men . . . pity I'm not one of them, isn't it? You won't be sorry when I go West. Walter meant well—one could have relied on him to keep out of the way. But me? I'm too

panache—and too damned bad form. When you marry Olive—by the way—how is Olive?"

Martin, in a very still and reticent voice, had not heard from Miss Charnwood lately.

"Speak to me," said Sladen. "Put aside the reserve typical of the wellbred English gentleman, my Martin, and let us have a heart to heart conversation. We may both of us be dead before dawn." He stopped, and a sort of spasm shook him. "I care more for Olive than for anything else on earth."

"You?" said Martin incredulous.

"Yes. You don't know what she's been to me." He turned his head so that his face was hidden. "I am no good: don't I know it? No good whatever. But—I never quite touched bottom. Olive saved me. I've swindled swindlers, but not honest men. Never mind. I can't go into all that. But, if you see her again, give her my love. She never meddled. I've had my whack of sermons, but never one from her." Time and again Olive's conscience had urged her to speak unpalatable truths to Sladen, but a wiser love had held her silent, though even Leigh had warned her that she was letting him go downhill the faster for her inaction: men are all too ready to judge and to advise, but their judgments are often deceived, and *securius est accipere consilium quam dare.* "I've done for her what was in my power to do. Did you imagine I crawled over here out of affection for you? Painful thought, isn't it? Be at ease, you're under no such obligation: I came because of her. . . . Are you afraid of death?"

"Are you?"

"Not a bit. I'm curious, intensely curious. This

world is a rotten place, the next can't be any worse. Or does one simply go out? I don't care. I'm not afraid of loss of identity—I'm not sufficiently anxious to preserve my own. But if I could choose," he seemed to be talking to himself now, and in the low broken wandering tones of imperfect control, "to wake on the bosom of God . . . the eternal, the infinite, and the pure . . . like a sea of light, like a ring . . . *per ardua ad astra* was on Delphine's ring . . . but she's young, she'll forget . . . Martin, I say: are you going to marry Olive?"

It was a question to which Martin had long known the answer. In his brief times of leave, he had not tried to bind Olive by any formal tie: fastidious and patient, he preferred to wait at any risk sooner than snatch at happiness piecemeal: but he was not more sure of the sun's rising than that if he survived the war it would be to return to Olive's arms, to the home of love they offered him, never to be separated from her again. War, which never yet changed a man's nature, may all the same open or close windows in his mind, and in watching so many other men and women gallantly building up new lives on the ruins of the old he had learnt resignation to man's common lot. Ghosts? After Mons, after Le Cateau, Martin had acquired a certain hardy, not to say scornful indifference to civilian ghosts. But the mere fact that Sladen was coarse enough to question him precluded any reply.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I'm not at ease about her. . . . Dreaming and dreaming and turning things over in my mind, it has come to me that Olive is strange . . . that . . . I can't . . . Why has she refused you so long? Any

child could see she cared for you. . . . Those infernal guns! Odd thing, one would think one would grow used to them, but when you're out of sorts you can't stand them . . . I can't . . . the interminable nights. . . . You haven't given her up, have you?" He was his own master once more and his restless eyes tried to pierce Martin's pale, indifferent face. "You will marry her?"

Martin's inclination was to reply, "That is my affair." Since Sladen was Olive's brother and the fumes of Sladen's brandy still glowed in his head, he held his tongue.

"It is strange how thoughts come out of the past to torment one. . . . How strong these flowers smell, it isn't only dead men, there's opium in it too . . . There was a bed of Shirley poppies on the terrace when I was at Greys in June. . . . There was a night. . . . It was so long ago, I've half forgotten. . . . But what made her cry out 'Isn't once enough?' I did fail her. . . . But it couldn't—it couldn't have made any odds . . . it was so long ago, that night . . ."

A night at Cap Martin? The cold and cruel impulse came on Martin to confirm these indistinct terrors which had glimmered on Sladen so strangely out of the shadows of the past. How undeservedly Olive had spared him! Why should he escape punishment? A night at Cap Martin . . . one had only to open one's lips and for Sladen too the wheel would come full circle. Yet when there was so much pain going in the world, pain indiscriminate and irremediable, it seemed a pity to increase the general sum of distress: what men needed now was not revenge but a common amnesty. . . . Happily for Sladen and perhaps more happily for himself, Martin

held his peace. But silence was the limit of his pity.

"How you hate me, Martin Laleham!" Sladen dropped his head on his crossed arms again. "You'll see me dead before you'll answer me: and it was the one thing I still wanted to know."

The sun was declining now in a clear West: the smoke of the last distant crash of gunfire had drifted away. The sky was a wash of pale gold flecked here and there with islands of brownish cloud. Against it, waving thinly round each little hollow's diminutive horizon, the high grasses were etched delicately black: and through the transparent silk coat of a poppy its glow shone scarlet, scarlet as a drop of blood.

Martin stirred and sighed faintly: he was in severe pain, and fatigue to the point at which fatigue itself becomes pain. It was a long time since Sladen had opened his lips, but when Martin moved he raised his head again. He seemed to Martin to have altered frightfully within the last hour or so: his features were pinched in an extraordinary way, the lines of the nose drawn sharp and deep, the flat of the temples hollowed, the jaw dragged down crookedly at one side. Martin stared at him apathetically. He looked like death—but dying men are not so loquacious nor so composed: and Martin was cool enough to reflect that the grass would not have seemed to him quite so black, nor the poppy so scarlet, nor the sun so incandescent, nor Sladen such a carnival mask of horror, if he had not seen all colours heightened across the prism of a rising fever. No doubt Sladen like himself was feeling the burden and heat of the day, the wearying roughness of the soil they lay on.

"Feeling bad?" asked Sladen in a harsh high voice.

"So-so: aren't you?"

"It'll be dark in an hour and the wounded are scattered wide . . . oh God! another two or three hours? I can't . . ." Sladen seemed to be conducting an argument with himself. ". . . you can't, can't you? but you're damned well going to. . . ."

"Lie quiet, Charnwood: don't give them a mark."

"Rather a gamble . . . chance it, eh?" Never completely dimmed, the light of conscious intelligence had flashed up again in Sladen's eyes.

"Chance what?"

"This. . . . Take it, my dear friend: I'll stand sentry for a bit."

"No; take it yourself."

"Can't, Pills says you mustn't when you've a pain in your sash." Martin knew of course that this was true; what he did not know was that the medical officer would have given Sladen whatever on earth he desired. "When it wears off you can take my place at sentry and I'll—I'll go to sleep. You open your mouth like a good little boy and take what daddy gives you." He pressed the opium tablet between Martin's lips. "Now go to bye-bye, you'll feel easier in a little while. Good night, old man—good night . . ."

There was a tenderness in Sladen's voice which touched Martin in spite of himself, but he was too shy to express his gratitude—time enough for that difficult task later on, when he was not so tired, so deadly tired. . . . He drew a long breath and shut his eyes. . . . Imperceptibly, moment by moment, the white-hot-steel fingers of pain relinquished their clutch on his broken bones, first

one nerve ceased to throb and then another, first one and then another hammer-stroke failed of its agonising iteration, and he felt himself slowly, slowly drifting out on a tranquil ebb. . . .

Sladen, propped on one elbow, remained bending over him. It was evening—sunset . . . it would be night soon, night with its beautiful remote stars and its drenching dews that chill a blood-drained man to the bone. Sladen set his teeth and struggled up. He was not afraid now of turning over, for Martin could neither see his condition nor hear the deep groan that movement wrung out of him. And slowly, at greater cost of energy than a hale man expends on a twenty mile walk, he got his arms out of the sleeves of his tunic. When the buckle of his belt caught, Sladen burst out crying—crying in great sobs, the tears running down his cheeks. But he got his coat off at last, and was spreading it over Martin, when there came a familiar sound from a familiar copse of skeleton elm trees—the rattle of machine gunfire.

"Oh my God!" whimpered Sladen querulously, "those damned brutes have turned the damned thing on us!" In struggling out of his tunic he had forgotten that he was safe only so long as he lay flat, or nearly flat, and had allowed his head and shoulders to rise for a moment above the skyline; and now the enemy were methodically spraying bullets over the torn and trampled field. Not a few of their own wounded lay in the same predicament. No matter for that, it was an English head that had risen for a moment out of the waving grass-stems. Sladen cowered down again and feebly shook his fist at the invisible spinney, while the bullets came striking all round him like hailstones, and already he could hear the

tortured cries of wounded who were being wounded afresh. "You devils!" Sladen sobbed, the tears still running down his face. A terrible feeling of helplessness came over him as he realised that their gravel pit was too shallow to protect them. There was but one thing to be done—and rallying his last ounce of strength he crawled forward, trailing his legs like a paralysed dog, and stretched himself out upon Martin, so that his body was between Martin's body and death. A frail shield: but night was falling fast, and to all things on earth, even to machine gunfire, there comes an end. . . .

"This way. . . ."

The men heard the feeble signal and crept up stumbling in the dark. "Here!" Sladen lifted a pale hand. "No. Not me. Under me."

Fumbling in gloom, they lifted him off and laid him down again by Martin's side. "Hullo! This is Major Laleham," muttered the first, peering into the starlit face. He opened Martin's tunic and felt his heart.

"All well?" Sladen murmured.

"Alive at all events. How about you? Better take Major Laleham first and come back for you——"

"Oh, I'm done in," said Sladen in a tone as if he were smiling. He stretched himself out and gave a little sigh. To the most protracted form of death there comes an end. The man kneeling over him uttered a stifled exclamation of surprise.

"What's up?"

"His number," was the laconic reply, in the casual murmur of the field ambulance inured to necessary dangerous dialogues. They got Martin on the stretcher. Close on their right, too close to be pleasant, a star shell

shot up, and as it burst and they dropped flat there came a vicious chatter of rifle-fire. "Time enough too. He's all one wound," added the first bearer, as night returned for a little while and they rose to their feet once more.

"Good job too."

"'Think so?"

"I lay you don't want to come all over here again any more than what I do."

And tenderly, gently, slowly, without consideration of their own safety, they carried away the living and left the dead.

CHAPTER XXIV

A silken evening in mid-October; the sunset of one of those autumn days into which the year seems to distil its last drops of honied sweetness and warmth. The Laleham woods were scarcely thinned, nor the trees in the garden of Greys: towers of gold, even in the twilight they cast not a shade but a glow over grey flagstones and sunburnt turf.

There was no one on the terrace but Martin Laleham, lying out in an Indian chair, a shut book on his knee. Mid-October: warm as the air was it breathed of the coming winter—mixed with the sweetness of roses came the smell of damp earth, damp woods, and night frosts, and the aromatic smoke of a bonfire. Martin, so indifferent to sport, cared keenly for these quieter country pleasures—for the scent of field and flower: for the river's murmur, and the croon of a wild pigeon, "Take *two* sticks, Taf-fy: take *two* sticks, Taf-fy: *two*": for the slow oncoming of night, its gradual effacement of landmarks, its gradual dimming of amber to an infinite monotone of russet-colour and mother-o'-pearl. Indoors Olive was striking a few chords on a piano, *Nuages*, a melancholy sequence of harmonies, cloud melting into cloud: not only every tone came out to him but the crackle of flames on the hearth. It was the fifth autumn of the war, and across the Channel guns were still roaring day and night. But were they so loud as they had been six months ago? Darkness was falling over Dorset-

shire. But over all the world was not the universal shadow beginning to lighten and lift?

Jane, lying on her master's lap, wrinkled her nose in an enquiring sniff in the direction of the verandah. She was a sober little dog now and not so ready as she would have been four years ago to fly to meet a friend. Better stay where one was well off: who knew how soon one's master might go away again and leave a little dog to sit and shiver among his unsatisfying cold coats?

"All alone, Martin? What are you reading?"

"Nothing."

Sitting on the arm of Martin's chair and softly patting Jane's flank, Denis fished up the slim volume, which Martin seemed to be anxious to sit on, and read out the title: "Poems, 1914–1917, by Maurice Leigh." He coloured all over his face in sympathetic surprise and excitement: "You old fraud, you never told me you were bringing out some more poetry!"

"It wouldn't do for me to put my name to it," said Martin, lighting a cigarette to keep himself in countenance. "Do you know what subjective means? No, I hoped you wouldn't. I, Denis, am a subjective writer. I use up everyone I know and everything that happens to me. You're all in it—you, Olive, Julian, and . . . It's only minor verse, but it's the best I've ever done. Take it away and read it. Read the thing at the end called *Vain Regret*. You'll understand it. Well," his vein of candour had exhausted itself and he changed the subject with a firmness familiar to Denis, "how did you get on in London—what about the Board?"

"They've given me another month, they say my heart isn't sound yet: and when I do go back to duty I expect

it'll be some rotten job at home, papers and figures and things. I shall feel as if I were clerking again in Mollendo. However, it might be worse."

"It might. I'm discharged."

"Invalided out? Your knee——?"

"M'm."

"Oh, I say," again Denis flushed deeply, "and you let *me* go on grousing!"

Martin smiled. "There are alleviations. I shan't have to hunt any more. To be honest with you—as Hurst says, I stuck to my job as long as my job stuck to me, but it would be vain to pretend that I mind being thrown out of it."

"What shall you do?"

"Some sort of paid war work, I suppose; one of my uncles will get me into something—if the war isn't over before I'm up to it. Sometimes I wonder if Julian won't score a bull's eye this time with his eternal 'Over by Christmas.' "

"Not really? I say, Martin——"

"What, then?"

"Isn't it about time we dropped this horrid rubbish about me being Lord Laleham?"

" 'Dropped this'—what on earth do you mean?"

"I do hate it so!" Denis cried, like water bursting out of a dam. "And it'll be ten million times worse when the war *is* over and Laleham's cleared out and I have to live there and live up to it! How am *I* to live in a place that's simply infested all over with footmen? You know I never did like even Littledale, but I'm used to him and I've really got rather fond of him, but I shall never know the ones at Laleham even by sight!"

"You idiot," said Martin, seized by one of those *fous rires* that mark the reaction after a long period of depression, "you really are an idiot, Denis!"

"I can't help it."

"But come now—we had this out four years ago, you don't want Trelawney to go all through it again?"

"Not about the title. In a way," his inveterate sense of justice came to Denis's aid, "I can see that you wouldn't care to be called Lord Laleham so long as I'm alive, if I am the heir I am, though it's a horrid nuisance. But—but—after all you are your father's son. It was just ill luck that he died without providing for you. And when you talk of getting *paid* war work—going away from Laleham, which you love, and earning your living, which you weren't brought up to do, and you won't be fit to do it for a twelvemonth anyhow, you can't walk across the room without turning faint, you think we can't see it but we can——"

"H'm," said his brother after a pregnant silence: "so that's where the shoe pinches, is it?"

It may or may not have been a disappointment to Martin Laleham, it can hardly have been a surprise, that the War Office had no further use for his services. With operation after operation they had saved the leg, but at the expense of an inch and a half of bone. He twined Jane's ear round his forefinger, and Jane tried to lick his hand; she still hated to have her ears pulled, but she wasn't going to say so, in case he should go away again.

"How much do you propose to allow me?"

"As much as you'll take."

"A blank cheque? Considering the way you were treated, I recognise your great generosity"—Denis gave

an involuntary start—"I beg your pardon," said Martin curtly. "I am a swine. You're all that's forbearing and delicate, and I'm not a bit grateful. It's always the way. Money!" He shrugged his shoulders. "I'd have sworn I shouldn't mind taking money from you, but I do."

"But, Martin, any man may take an allowance from his brother!"

"You're all so kind. My mother offers me the lion's share of her jointure."

"Her to give it you instead of me? Oh! for you not to be beholden to me?"

"Oh damn!" Martin broke out: "get down, Jinny, you're lying on my knee!"

It was the effect of four months' illness that he was so captious and irritable: his saner self had no more wish to wound Denis than to wound Jane, who had been bundled down in a very unceremonious manner, and stood a little way off with her tail between her legs, apologising (like Denis) for her existence. Martin was ashamed of himself. He patted the side of his chair, and Jane pricked her dejected ears, and came scrambling back, and walked over his stomach, and licked his face in penitent affection, and settled down and went to sleep again with her chin on his arm. It was easy to console Jane, but not so easy to console Denis, who was equally unreproachful but more enduringly wounded.

Denis had never cherished any delusions about Lady Laleham. Although she had stood by him as if she had been his own mother, she was only human and he was sure she could not but regret the alienation of Laleham from Martin and Martin's children. Long ago Denis had

determined never to marry. But now he began to wonder, with the lucid candour which in him was so strangely linked not to cynicism but to charity, whether that small sacrifice was enough. Had Lady Laleham been sincere that evening in congratulating him on the Medical Board's decision, or did she wish, in some thievish corner of her magnanimous heart, that they had sent him back to the forefront of the battle?

"Denis, don't you worry. I shall have to come off my high horse, but for my life I can't do it gracefully." Martin looked up with his melancholy whimsical smile. "After all, 'there's sadder things in life than the death o' Jan's mare.' Have you remembered—? Two years ago to-day——"

"M'm. I did remember, this morning. I dropped in at Laleham on my way to town, not to say anything, I was too afraid of hurting her, but I took her some flowers, I knew she'd guess why."

"She'll get over it." Martin paused to light a second cigarette. "She is but twenty now. They do get over it, these young ones: children's bones set easily. She'll re-marry. But yet, there's no denying it, the bloom goes, that first—what's the word? efflorescence of young happiness. Heigho! Is that you, Olive, with my coat? You've been most fearfully and awfully slow over getting it, I've caught three colds and a rheumatism——"

A tall figure stooped over the back of his chair, a large hand, nut-brown and scarred, took possession of his cigarette case: "Matches also?" a self-possessed voice enquired.

"Julian! Why, where on earth do you spring from?"

"Home, on ten days' leave. I haven't had any since

July!" Julian's tone was injured: why shouldn't he get leave in October as well as in July?—It was typical of Julian that he got his leave, whoever else didn't: why? Not because he took undue pains over getting it. No, it was Julian's luck, that was all.

"I picked up Sophy en route. She's indoors with Olive. Says she feels shy. Gad! you've got a limp on you, old Martin!" Martin had got out of his chair to welcome his brother-in-law, but Julian without ceremony seized him by the shoulders and laid him flat again, and then turned round to hug Denis—literally to hug him: Major Julian Charnwood home on leave, handsomer than ever in spite of a scarred cheek, and as rowdy as one of his own second lieutenants in the effervescence of reaction, was an embarrassing phenomenon and had been known to waltz with Littledale. Denis was mildly fending him off when Olive appeared with Sophy, Olive's arm round Sophy's waist, Sophy very red, recalcitrant, wrapping herself in a coat, as Martin said, "like Monna Vanna": it was one thing to drive about London in breeches and boots, and quite another to be torn away by Julian's impetuosity without time to change, and thrown to the wolves of an admiring family circle. Sophy had tried nursing at Laleham Chase, which under Lady Laleham's direction had been turned into a hospital since the first autumn of the war, but neither her taste nor her powers lay in that direction: Delphine had twice her nerve and ten times her dexterity. Ultimately Sophy was sent to the kitchen, where, to Lady Laleham's exasperation, the cook pronounced her willing but incompetent: and the six most depressing months of her life Sophy spent bottle-washing in the Laleham pantries.

It was Julian who suggested that as his young wife was no good at women's jobs she had better try life as a man, and to her dying day Sophy was grateful to him for redeeming her self-respect. She couldn't nurse, she couldn't cook anything except bacon and eggs (and even her fryings and poachings had a tendency to degenerate into scramblings), but as a lorry driver Sophy shone: she fainted at sight of blood, but sat calm at her wheel under a sky full of raider aeroplanes: the smell of iodine gave her a sick headache, but she was impervious to wind and weather, and swaggered about in her long brown tunic and knee-breeches, very thin and tanned and bright of eye, but as healthy as any young subaltern and as unaware of her nerves.

Denis slipped away at the moment when Sophy, divested of her oilskin, was trying to sit on her legs. He loved to hear them all laughing and talking at once, to watch Martin's dark face lighting up, and Olive's rounding into softer curves than it had worn since her girlhood: but for once he did not care to join them, not even in his usual rôle of Christmas uncle. He strolled across the terrace, past the beds which in June had been a riot of Shirley poppies, crumpled silken petallings of lilac and black and red, to the verandah: and there he stood leaning on the carved balustrade, as he had stood, how long ago was it? in the midnight moonlight of August. He could almost feel Sladen's hand on his arm again, almost hear the odd drawling twang, "Tell daddy all about it."

There was little to tell. Claude, Lord Laleham, slept with his fathers, and Denis his son reigned in his stead. The county, after its first convulsions of astonishment, had settled down, under firm pressure from Martin and

Lady Laleham, into acceptance of the *fait accompli.* Four years had flowed on, sweeping away like a stream the memories and sorrows, the hesitations and fears of the past. To Olive they had brought happiness, and, through her, to Denis: he drew unfailing consolation from a wayside remark of Martin's, though he couldn't understand it— "If you had stayed in Peru, Olive never would have married me." To Sophy and Julian happiness still tempered by anxiety—but not a very deep anxiety: strange to say, neither Julian nor Sophy had much fear of Julian's getting killed. He had a cat-like knack of falling on his legs. He had been in one hot corner after another, and twice wounded, but lightly, and he had forgotten—a happy memory was Julian's—that he had ever objected to going into the war. He was not even ruined, for Macintyre had kept the business together, and there was more money in it than before. And then there were the others: Leigh, who had won a D.S.O. and civic honours for an Homeric raiding flight that had chanced to seize public imagination: Walter, accepted after three rejections only to die quietly of influenza on Salisbury Plain: Delphine—but one's thoughts shrank from dwelling on Delphine, one of those widowed children whom men's incredibly unimaginative cruelty was prone to call heartless, prettier than ever, yet withered like a flower cut by an early frost, so coquettish and so gay when she came off duty, in her fresh white dresses and black or lilac hats: Sladen, who seemed hardly yet dead. . . . It was a bitter, an unforgotten grief to Denis that Sladen had gone without a word of farewell.

"Day-dreaming, Denis?"

He started and turned round. "Oh, Lady Laleham, is that you?"

"I came in for a chat with Sophy. Delphine was in the post office and saw the car go by. They're down the garden— I hear them, don't I?"

"Yes: Martin too. Will you come?"

"Presently."

She too crossed her arms on the balustrade and stood silent. Her fine head had aged in the last four years: there were deep wrinkles round her eyes, and her mouth was heavily set.

"Dear Lady Laleham," Denis touched her arm, "you're not worrying over Martin's being discharged, are you?"

She smiled. "I'm afraid not many mothers worry over that."

"Is there anything else?"

"No," said Grace: "no."

She was silent again for a while.

"I suppose the truth is that I feel lonely, my dear. Most people do when they get to my age. Martin is my own dear boy, and Olive is the best of daughters-in-law, though I wish she didn't smoke——"

"I thought she'd given it up?"

"So she did, for a time. But when Martin heard of it he made such a fuss, and said I was so old-fashioned,— in short," said Lady Laleham, "I gave way against my better judgment." This was one way of saying that she had begged Olive to smoke a clay pipe all day long sooner than ruffle Martin. "Still she is a dear girl and very much improved: and I'm thoroughly happy about

Sophy and Julian. But—well, there it is: I'm an old woman, and I'm alone."

"But they don't want to leave you alone!"

"Ah! but suppose I prefer it?—I fancy you and I are in the same boat, Denis: they all love you, they all want you to make a third, but you don't always care to make a third, do you? No more do I. I want my own husband back, a lover of my own, the one out of all the world who shared all his cares and joys and his thoughts and his very life with me: isn't it absurd to hear a white-haired old woman talking like that of an old man who has been dead now, how long is it? Ah! to me it's not four and twenty hours."

"Don't! don't!" said Denis brokenly, "when it was my fault."

"No, my dear, it was his own fault. Claude was always wilful. I loved him all the better for it and I wouldn't have had him different, but when his face was once set the wrong way he was a pig-headedly obstinate man. I told him so dozens of times and so I don't mind owning it to you, though he was your father. If he had acted with ordinary common sense he might have been alive to-day, or even if we had lost him we might be much more comfortable than we are now, because there need never have been this tiresome trouble with Martin. Have you been on at Martin to-night?"

"M'm."

"So I thought, by the depressed look of you. And——?"

"He does mind."

"T'ck! T'ck! He's his father's own son. Trust a

Laleham to make everyone as uncomfortable as he can. But I hoped Martin had enough of me in him——"

Denis faced her with his candid eyes. "But he says you don't want him to take my money!"

"Nonsense! I never dreamt of it."

"But you offered him your own?"

"So I did," said Grace tartly: "as you'll see a silly woman pop a comforter into her baby's mouth—to stop it crying. Do pray have a little sense yourself! do you think I *want* to give him half my income? It's little enough as it is, what with income-tax and the price of food. Dear, dear, you boys are so full of fancies! But Martin must come round, in justice to you: I haven't the heart to scold him now, poor boy, but when he gets a little stronger I'll tackle him."

"You've made me very happy," said Denis in his shy, hesitating manner: "much happier than I was five minutes ago. In fact I've been wondering whether I couldn't get the Board to let me go out after all——"

"Denis!"

"Have I shocked you? But it's so natural!"

"You have shocked me very much, and hurt me too."

"But I am a usurper— I've turned Martin out."

"I am not going to argue the point," said Lady Laleham. "But never let me hear you say such a thing again—or think it either."

She did what she had never done before—she drew him down to her and kissed him. "My poor boy! Certainly your father did his best to spoil your life. I shall have to find some nice girl for you—some very nice girl—" His faint smile checked her. "But, dear, it's natural

for a young man to marry! You need a wife and children and a home of your own: you've lived too long in exile."

He shook his head. "I shan't marry—ever. I'm not so young as I seem to you people, you know. Thirty-nine! It's middle-age. I shall love it if Martin and Olive have children, but I don't want any of my own. I think perhaps there's something gone wrong inside me: as if I'd lived too long in exile to ever come quite home."

There was a sadness in his tone that put Lady Laleham to silence. This then was perhaps one of life's irremediable wrongs: one of those "things done long ago and ill done" that can never be repaired. It was bitter to her not only because she loved Denis but because the fault of it lay with Claude. The difficult Laleham temper! And now to see it cropping up again in Martin, of all people! Martin, generous and gentle, yet stubborn, like his father, and with something proud and cold and ruthless in him under all his courtesy. . . . "Oh, my dear," Lady Laleham murmured, "I can't bear to see you looking so sad!"

"I was thinking of the dead."

"Of your father?"

"And—others."

"In your regiment?" Denis nodded. "And that poor boy?"

"It seems such a waste."

Twilight was deepening while they watched, drawing veil after grey veil between them and the shadowy Channel heights and the grey waters where no lamps now twinkled on shore or sea. It was a time for ghosts to come with their light wandering tread . . . Sladen

might be a scamp and a blackguard, but his sharp, strong personality had been so vivid that it was difficult to believe he would never come again . . . that he had lain bleeding his life out in June, and was cold and stiff now, the earth in his black eyes. Grace had forgiven the organ-grinder: nay more, she had wept for him with unavailing tears, those bitter tears of vain regret that bring no heart's ease when death has set its imprimatur on some cruel misjudgment: if his ghost could see what passed on earth, it must have worn a rather sardonic smile at such unexpected manifestations of sentiment. Among the Laleham brasses in the old parish church, who could have foreseen that Lady Laleham, of all people, would insist on putting up a memorial to Sladen Charnwood? Yet there his name hung, keeping better company than he had kept in his lifetime: a brief record of the brief span of one "who gave his life for another." A stroke of irony, if anyone had known it, for Sladen had to all intents and purposes died at dawn. What his iron will had in truth given for Martin, or rather for Olive, was the resolute crucifying postponement, from dawn till midnight, of escape from his death agonies into death.

"Of what are you thinking, Martin?"

"Of you—of you."

"Am I beautiful?"

"Beautiful by daylight in your everlasting serges and friezes, but by moonlight— How soon will you give me a child, Olive?"

"Oh . . ."

"Well, darling, there's the country to consider."

"Oh! . . . Were you considering the country?"

"No."

"Martin."

"What, then?"

"You never, never—do you?"

"M'm?"

"Remember . . ."

"Finish."

"Ghosts . . . do you?"

"Whose ghost?"

"Patru's."

"Between me and you?"

"Oh, you don't . . . do you?"

"Sometimes. There's no such thing as perfect happiness in this life. Thoughts come out of the past to torment one. But it was a long while ago, that night—so long ago . . . Kiss me and go to sleep. The price is paid for our happiness, Fair-Star: it flowers out of death, and worse than death: the least I can do to deserve it is to forget. It is not by vain regret that a commemoration is made of sacrifice. . . ."

So the grass began to grow on Sladen's grave.

THE END

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